

The Fiendish Guide to Punctuation V1.4
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This guide is intended to provide a basic but complete, or at least I hope to make it complete over time, guide to punctuation in the English language. It will be primarily targeted at authors who write fictional stories using the standard story style. It will include subsections pointing out the differences in US, UK and Canadian standards; almost everybody uses one of the three.

I will keep adding items to this guide as I think of them, or I am asked about them.

SECTION 01

This Section covers: (Commas, Semi-colons; Question Marks or Interrogation Points? Exclamation Points! Apostrophes' and Periods.) The core of the written language.

First is the trusty, ever-useful Period. In the UK it is most commonly referred to as a full stop. Periods are used to end sentences and indicate long pauses in speech. Periods are only used singularly, with one exception; when you need to indicate a long pause, it is acceptable to use three periods in a row, this is referred to as an ellipsis or marks of omission. However, this is only ever acceptable during speech, and not during narration or story telling. A single period represents a three beat stop. Three in a row indicate a stop of six to sixty beats. Anything longer should really be mentioned using an aside or a descriptive. You should never use a period after any other punctuation except a parenthesis or quotes, and those are special situations I'll cover in a later section.

Here are a few examples:

- 1) This sentence is simple.
- 2) When you speak and need to take a long pause... this is what you use.
- 3) "What is happening..." is an example of a broken idea.
- 4) "He was... green with envy! Yeah that's right.

Next come **the Question Mark** (It sometimes referred to as an Interrogation Point) and **the Exclamation Point**. Both follow the same basic rules, and are the only termination punctuation you can double. A question mark ends a question like the name implies, and an exclamation point ends an exclamation or, in other words a sentence that happened in surprise, or with great emotion.

Now, since we have all seen a question asked in exclamation, how do you punctuate that? Well you have two choices. First, just use a question mark, or second, use both a question mark and an exclamation point. Yes, you can use both. Now comes the question of intent, because you can both use '!' and '?!' So what's the difference? The Exclamation first is used for lesser surprise in the US and UK, while the second reflects greater surprise,

however in Canada it tends to be reversed, especially in bilingual communities. However I must point out that even though these are both correct, most books recommend avoiding them because they look bizarre on paper. I don't use them often, but I have used them myself.

Here are a few examples:

- 1) What is happening here?
- 2) Huh!
- 3) What the hell happened to you!?
- 4) Who the fuck are you?!

The apostrophe is both the easiest and the most difficult; I know - how can this be true? Well, the rule is easy; you use an apostrophe to replace letters removed from a word or series of words (called a contraction) and to indicate possession.

Examples of contractions are:

- 1) Can not becomes can't
- 2) Did not becomes didn't
- 3) Could have becomes could've

Examples of possession are:

- 1) Jack's coat. (Which means the coat belongs to Jack)
- 2) Canada's coastline. (Which means the coastline belongs to Canada)

As you can see, nouns always take an 's to show possession. However, pronouns never do. A pronoun (he, she, it, for example) followed by 's is NOT possessive, it is a contraction.

Examples of contracted pronouns are:

- 1) He's means He is or He has.
- 2) She's means She is or She has.
- 3) It's means It is or It has. (Note, this is the one most commonly written incorrectly)

When you want to show possession with a pronoun, you replace it with another word called, surprisingly enough, a possessive pronoun. (His, Hers, Its)

Examples of pronouns are:

- 1) His meaning belongs to Him.
- 2) Hers meaning belongs to Her.
- 3) Its meaning belongs to it. (Again, note this one because it is often written incorrectly as "it's")

I will write a more in-depth Guide about pronouns soon. It will cover them in much greater depth.

So, an apostrophe always goes between letters to show either a contraction or possession when owned by a singular possessor. However, sometimes you need to show possession by more than one possessor. How do you do that? Well, you put the apostrophe on the other side of the s. It should be noted that you may also use a 's after the s, but it is not as elegant.. The previous rule also applies to any noun ending in an s.

For example:

- 1) The girls' dresses. (meaning the dresses belongs to the girls)
- 2) The boys' school. (meaning the school to which these boys go, rather than a school just for boys)
- 3) The Jones' garden (meaning the garden belongs to Mr and Mrs Jones)
- 4) George Harris' house (meaning the house belongs to George Harris)
- 5) The anus' muscular rings (meaning the rings that belong to the anus)

The last part of basic punctuation is mid sentence pauses, lists and inserts, for which we all use commas, but often we use them improperly and should actually be using a semi-colon. So how do you tell which is the correct one? I mean after all, they have similar purposes, so how do you pick the right one? Well, it's actually simple; however, when not to use them is a little harder to detect. A semi-colon has only one intrinsic use, so let's start there; a semi-colon is used to splice two complete sentences, which are related, together. I will write another guide on grammar, and you may want to use it to analyse any concept I use here. However, the definition of a sentence is very simple: (A sentence is a word or group of words that conveys a complete idea.) It is also acceptable to use a semi-colon when forming a list; however it is not as common a thing to see as a comma.

Here are a few examples:

- 1) It was the last thing he wanted to eat; he'd tried it once and hated it.
- 2) No one was hurt in the incident; the only real damage was to a few panes of glass.
- 3) The computer had a very fast processor; it was a top of the range model.

So now that we understand when to use a semi-colon, let's see when a comma is appropriate. The function of a comma is to indicate a pause for the reader to take a breath, but must also be used correctly. The first use for a comma is to separate a dependant clause from a complete sentence, this can be done either by placing it at the beginning or end of the sentence.

A comma is also used to insert a complete sentence, or a clause, within a sentence. You can also use a semi-colon for this, but the effect is different. It is also used to separate two clauses joined by a conjunction. However, you have to pay attention to where you place it, and, what it will do to your sentence's structure. It has an enormous affect on how the

sentence is read and, what you are saying. When you vary the placement of the comma you change how the sentence is read, and perceived.

Placed before the conjunction, it separates the first part from the rest, creating a greater emphasis on the end of the sentence. Placed after, it creates the opposite affect, subjugating the end of the sentence. However, if you use it both before and after, you are purposely breaking the flow of the sentence; generally this is used to highlight the affect of the importance of both parts independently.

Here are a few examples:

- 1) When you see a nice girl, and want to get her attention, try to find a reason to speak to her.
- 2) If that should prove difficult, don't give up.
- 3) A little persistence can prove useful and, who knows, she may actually come and speak to you.
- 4) It is, however, very important to make a move if she does not.

The last major use for a comma is in writing lists. For lists you may also use semi-colons as noted above; they can be substituted directly for commas when writing a list. You use it to split items in a list apart and to indicate that you are not done with the list. Used either independently, or in combination with an ending conjunction, it has a powerful effect on how the reader perceives the sentence and the items in the list. It should also be noted that you may place a comma just before or after an and ending a list to give the reader a break..

Here are a few examples:

- 1) She had bread, eggs, ham and mayo on her shopping list.
- 2) The salad was green, fresh, crispy and, best of all, cheap.
- 3) Tom, Dick, Arnold, John, get over here now!
- 4) I want courting, foreplay, romance, and sex.

A colon can also be used to introduce lists, generally used only on long lists or idea lists.

Here are a few examples:

- 1) The steps in writing are: brain storming, planning, writing a first draft, writing a second draft, correcting spelling and logic errors, writing a third draft, correcting and revising that draft, writing a final draft, correcting and proofreading that draft, then producing a final copy.
- 2) The main parts of a motor are: Pistons, valves, belts, pulleys, pumps and bolts.

Section 02

This section Covers: (Colons: “Double Quotes” ‘Single quotes or inverted commas

as they are called in the UK' Dashes or hyphens – and (Parentheses)) The core of expressing speech, thoughts and quoting.

The easiest way to approach these is to look at the way you insert speech into a sentence and, since that varies depending on where you were educated; there will be three separate sections. The first will be the US standard, the second will be the UK one, and the last will be the Canadian method. There are only minor differences but they should be mentioned. It is to be noted that these rules only apply to normal writing. Movie scripts, newspapers and plays use different rules which are independent of country.

In the US, you always use double quotes to indicate speech, and can introduce it either with a comma followed by a space then a double quote, or by colon followed by a space then a double quote. Just remember to pick one and stay true to it.

Here are a few examples:

- 1) Terry said, “I am really happy we met, Donna.”
- 2) “I am also happy we met,” Donna replied.
- 3) Terry smiled as he said: “I had fun.”
- 4) “So did I,” replied an enthusiastic Donna.

You will also note that you punctuate the sentence identically if you use a post speech quote. This style is also used for thought.

Here are a few examples:

- 1) Terry thought: “Donna looks so good in those shorts.”
- 2) “I really like this,” Donna thought as she watched Terry.
- 3) Terry’s mind filled with the question, “I wonder what Donna is thinking?”

In the UK the above rules apply, however the single quote can also be used. All other punctuation remains the same, both in speech and thought.

However the Canadians and British have adapted an interesting way of punctuating speech and thought, they use double quotes for speech and single ones for thoughts. Again all other rules stay the same.

It is also to be noted that since you can quote another person’s speech while talking, like recalling events or storytelling, that the same rules should be used. But you should always remember that since quotes can be layered, that they must **ALL** be closed also.

Here is example paragraph:

John looked at me and said, “Like I was telling you, she came up to me and said: “I don’t want to sleep with you yet. My pappy always said, “If a man loves you he will wait till you’re ready,” and since I am not ready yet, you’re waiting.” Well at that point I thought,

‘Great, what am I going to do tonight?’ but as I was trying to figure that out, she started to strip. I didn’t know what to do.” I thought, ‘Maybe I should say something.’ But before I could act John turned and left.

Quotes and double quotes can also be used to indicate text taken from another person’s works. Parenthesis are generally used to outline objectives in informative works, they should be really rare when you write stories. The last part of this section is Hyphens or dashes. Their main uses are to link two words together and to indicate ranges, but they are also used to indicate speech in script writing. So I will end this section with a brief look at script structure. In a play or movie script, you indicate speech by using a dash after listing the speaker, and you use parenthesis to indicate stage directions. I am writing a more complete guide on speech at this time. I will post it as soon as it is ready.

Section 03

The section covers: (Ampersands& underscores_ slashes/ back slashes\ number or hash signs# dollar signs\$ cent or penny signs¢ asterisk* commercial As or at symbols@ and tildes~) All the exceptions and non writing symbols.

Ok, you may ask; if these are all non writing symbols, why do I mention them? Well, even though they are not designed for it, some of these symbols are still used from time to time when you write. I don’t use them, but others do, so I will explained them briefly.

The Ampersand& is sometimes used as a replacement for and, and is perfectly acceptable for use in titles and proper names except in the UK, where it is heavily frowned upon.

The At symbol@ as we all now call it is sometimes used as a replacement for the word at, and is again acceptable for use in proper names, such as Seti@home, except in the UK, where it is heavily frowned upon. Of course it is used for email addresses.

The Underscore_ is not really used, but can be used to indicate blanks in speech, either from static or interruptions or to indicate a desire by the speaker for the person spoken to to fill in the blanks. Again I don’t use it but you can if you want to.

Asterisks* are sometimes used to indicate a badly pronounced syllable or vowel.

The Back slash are used sometimes when indicating a doubled word by the speaker. It can also be used for a crossed skill or noun.

Here are a few examples:

- 1) He/she/it was looking at me.
- 2) He was a plumber/electrician.

Again I don’t recommend it, but it is sometimes used.

Slashes / is never really used, but can sometimes be used as a substitute for a slash. I don't recommend its use.

The tildes~ are used sometimes when introducing a conversation that has already begun before the reader is able to hear.

Here are a few examples:

- 1) “~and that's why I had my balls varnished.”
- 2) “~but anyhow, what happened to yours? I mean your husband.”

It's rare to use this one, but it can be useful for impact.

There are also recognised punctuation groups, or as they are now called Emoticons, that have migrated from email like:

;) :) :-) :| ;| :-| :(:(:-(|

They are just now starting to appear in compositions, if you choose to use them, they should be considered as insert that have no effect on the punctuation.

The last category is all other symbols, you can use them, but realise that it **implies** laziness or bad skill. Using them is up to you, I personally do my best to write them out in words, even dollars and cents.