

Common Punctuation Marks

1. Periods / Full stops (.)
2. Colons (:)
3. Semicolons (;)
4. Forward Slashes (/)
6. Hyphens (-)
7. Dashes (—) (--)
8. Quotation Marks (") (')
9. Parentheses / Brackets () [] { }

You may notice that **commas** (,) and **apostrophes** (') are missing from the above list. Please see the UCD Writing Centre's individual handouts on these 2 punctuation marks.

Periods / Full Stops (.)

We use periods/ full stops:

1. **To indicate when a sentence is finished**, e.g. The student concluded the research phase of the project very quickly.
2. **When we are using common Latin abbreviations**. In these instances, the period/full stop is used to indicate the end of each abbreviated word. For example:
 - **e.g.** = *exempli gratia*, which means "for instance".
 - **i.e.** = *id est*, which means "in other words".
 - **etc.** = *et cetera*, which means "and the rest", or, "and so on".

Colons (:)

We use colons to:

1. **Introduce a quotation**, e.g. In his work on the history of the field, John Smith states: "This lack of consensus within the field may in part be attributed to the fact that the existing models are outdated".
2. **Introduce lists, texts, graphs, and tables**, e.g. The research revealed that there are three major variants impacting overall health: age, diet, and weight-height ratios.
3. **Emphasise an important point**, e.g. There is only one way to improve your writing skills: read.
4. **Provide explanatory subtitles**, e.g. Jeffrey Malanson carefully maps early American culture and identity in his book, *Addressing America: George Washington's Farewell and the Making of National Culture, Politics, and Diplomacy, 1796-1852*.

Semicolons (;)

We use semicolons to:

- 1. Link 2 sentences / ideas together.** In such instances, you could use a period/ full stop to separate 2 full, independent sentences. However, you can use a semicolon to indicate that, although these are different sentences, the ideas covered in each sentence are connected to one another, e.g.
 - ✓ Good grades are integral to student success; a strong support network is essential to achieving those educational goals.
- 2. Separate particularly long items in a list.** In such instances, you can use a colon to introduce the list, and you can separate each item by using a semicolon, e.g.
 - ✓ The student listed three central ideas in her essay: contrary to popular belief, the late-Victorian period was not an entirely secular age; late-Victorian literature was replete with religious titles; and, having deployed the tactics of melodrama, late-Victorian authors rendered religious plotlines as scandalous.

Forward Slashes (/)

We use forward slashes to:

- 1. Indicate “or” in a sentence,** e.g. The survey analysed how frequently web users click the Refresh/Reload button per hour.
- 2. Indicate a new line in poetry,** e.g. The apparition of these faces in the crowd: /
Petals on a wet, black bough.
- 3. Indicate “per” in a measurement,** e.g. 50km/h (per hour), €1.59/litre (per litre).

Hyphens (-)

We use hyphens to:

- 1. Link parts of a compound word (phrases made up of more than 1 word).** Another way of thinking about this is when 2 words must work together to describe a noun, e.g.
 - ✓ The diaspora comprised mostly of Irish-Italian individuals.
 - ✓ The socio-economic disparities within the city are glaring.
 - ✓ The UCD Writing Centre offers thirty-minute sessions with tutors.
- 2. Avoid duplicating vowel sounds and triple consonants,** e.g.
 - ✓ The hill-like topography dramatically alters the vista.
 - ✓ The protestors’ anti-oppression agenda was forgotten in the violence.
 - ✓ The researchers used this strategy in order to pre-empt future oversights.

Dashes (–) (--)

A dash can be denoted by a what is called an “em dash” (–) in printing, or a dash can be denoted by two hyphens together (--) in plain text. We use dashes to:

- 1. Create greater emphasis**, e.g. The conference speakers reflected the central ethos of the event in their papers – equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- 2. Denote a major break or pause in the sentence (when we use 2 dashes to bookend a phrase, they function similarly to parentheses/ brackets)**, e.g. This government legislation – the first of its kind – brought about a standardised minimum wage for workers.

Quotation Marks (") (')

Quotation marks may be double (") or single ('), and this is determined by your School’s referencing style. We use quotation marks to:

- 1. Quote from a source, or indicate dialogue**, e.g.
 - ✓ Robinson argues that ‘elevated cardiac biomarker levels are a prominent feature’ of the disease.
 - ✓ In this climactic scene, Mercutio cries out: “A plague o’ both your houses!”.
- 2. Denote the title of a short story, poem, chapter, or journal article**, e.g. This thesis is supported by Adorno’s chapter on “Free Time” in his seminal work, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*.
- 3. Indicate sarcasm or irony (similar to air-quotes)**, e.g. Their ‘research’ involved little more than underdeveloped ideas found on social media.

Parentheses/ Brackets (the marks surrounding this sentence)

Parentheses/ brackets may be round (), square [], or curly { }. They always come in pairs: the opening part and the closing part. Parentheses/ brackets offer space for an aside or an interlude in a sentence that is grammatically correct without it. We use parentheses/ brackets marks to:

1. Provide clarification or additional, often non-essential, information, e.g.

- ✓ The rise in the animal's temperature (to 46°C) and its respiratory recovery time indicate that it requires immediate veterinary attention.
- ✓ The subject's grandmother (on his father's side) showed signs of early dementia in her mid-fifties.
- ✓ Charles Dickens (1812-1870) began contributing regularly to popular magazines in the early 1830s.

1. Provide referential information in such referencing styles as MLA and Harvard, e.g. Research on cancer cell development suggests that external forces contribute significantly to isometric tension (Walker 2011).

Punctuation Quiz

Can you place the correct punctuation marks in the correct positions? Read the excerpt below and insert what you think are the correct punctuation marks in the appropriate places. You will find the answers on the next page of this handout.

The Judeo Christian tradition places great emphasis on individual responsibility As scholars highlight Jesus speaking of Judgment Day declares Then two men will be in the field one is taken and one is left Two women will be grinding at the mill one is taken and one is left Robinson 2012 But ancient Mediterranean religion was community based Each polity had one or more deities with whom it had a special relationship and when those deities were unhappy their judgment was not passed on individuals but on the community as a whole Events that we classify as natural disasters fire, earthquake, flood to ancients were signs of divine displeasure they led to a search for causes and one that lay close to hand was the presence of Christians who refused to participate in traditional rites and denied the existence of the gods that they honored

- Adapted from H.A. Drake, "Christianity and Rome: A Study in Power Relations", *Old Society, New Belief: Religious Transformation of China and Rome, ca. 1st-6th Centuries*, edited by Mu-Chou Poo, H.A. Drake, and Lisa Raphals, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 35-52.

Punctuation Quiz: Answers

Below you will see the same excerpt as before. Now, however, all the correct punctuation marks are in the correct positions in the text. Were you right?

Hyphen for compound word.



Period. →

Parentheses,
comma. →

Dashes.
Parentheses
could also be
used. →

The Judeo-Christian tradition places great emphasis on individual responsibility. As scholars highlight, Jesus, speaking of Judgment Day, declares: "Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left" (Robinson, 2012). But ancient Mediterranean religion was community based. Each polity had one or more deities with whom it had a special relationship; and when those deities were unhappy, their judgment was not passed on individuals but on the community as a whole. Events that we classify as "natural disasters" — fire, earthquake, flood — to ancients were signs of divine displeasure; they led to a search for causes, and one that lay close to hand was the presence of Christians, who refused to participate in traditional rites and denied the existence of the gods that they honored.

← Quotation marks.

← Quotation marks.

← Semicolon.



Period.

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