

PUNCTUATION

EXCLAMATION MARK

The symbol '!' added to a sentence changes the tone of voice:

- In involuntary outbursts: *"Phew! That was a close shave!"*
- To salute or invoke: *"For goodness' sake, Stuart! Whatever were you thinking of?"*
- To exclaim (or admire): *"How many goodly creatures are there here!"*
- For drama: *"That's not the Northern Lights; that's the chemical plant!"*
- For adding emphasis: *"I could really do with a cup of tea and chocolate biscuits!"*
- To deflect potential misunderstanding or irony: *"I don't mean it!"*

QUESTION MARK

- A direct question: *Why won't the British accept the euro?*
- When the question is inside quotation marks: *"What's wrong with Europe?" he asked.*

But when questions are indirect, the sentence doesn't need one:

- *He asked me what time it was.*

ITALICS

Lift words out of the surrounding context and mark them as special:

- titles of books, newspapers, films, albums etc.
- emphasis of certain words
- foreign words and phrases
- examples when writing about language

QUOTATION MARKS

Also known as inverted commas, speech marks, or quotes. They are sometimes referred to as 'scare quotes', as with the headline "Britain to leave the EU". Such inverted commas may be single or double, although usually single in Britain and double in America. Doubles are used for speech and singles, for quotations-within-quotations.

Confusion can occur when the use of the apostrophe is included:

- ‘I was at St Thomas’ Hospital,’ she said.

Where to put the full stop:

- Moneypenny asked James if he was “on another mission”. (British)
- Moneypenny asked James if he was “on another mission.” (American)

When a piece of dialogue is attributed at its end, conclude it with a comma inside the inverted commas:

- *“You really did give an excellent audit presentation, Sarah,” remarked John.*

When the dialogue is attributed at the start, conclude with a full stop inside the inverted commas:

- *John replied, “Actually, Elisabeth had prepared everything for me.”*

When the dialogue stands on its own, the full stop comes inside the inverted commas:

- *“Another day, another audit report.”*

When only a fragment of speech is being quoted, punctuation comes outside the inverted commas:

- *Lewis recognized in Miss Seymour the “effects of LSD and alcohol”, and ran away.*

When the quotation is a question or exclamation, the question/exclamation mark comes inside the inverted commas:

- *“Are you completely mad?” asked Mike. “No, aliens really do exist!” he replied.*

When the question is posed by the sentence rather than by the speaker, the question mark goes outside the inverted commas:

- *Why didn’t you tell me before that Jenny was “completely mad”?*

When the punctuation relates to the quoted words, it goes inside the inverted commas; when it relates to the sentence, it goes outside. Unless, of course, you are in America.

THE DASH

Hard to use wrongly, easy to see, easy to use and considered the enemy of grammar (texting and emails).

It connects or separates phrases and sentences:

- *A few people – not more than ten – had already arrived.*

At the end of a sentence to recap its content:

- *Men were shouting, women were screaming, children were crying – it was chaos.*

At the end of a sentence to introduce a comment about what was just said:

- *David knew nothing about the planned meeting – or so he said.*

Where the first element is not a modifier of the second:

- *The Chinese–Soviet border. The 1914–18 war.*

HYPHEN

Connects or separates individual words to form compound words:

- *A 29-year-old man. A co-pilot, vice-president, mother-to-be, home-made jam...*

To join a prefix to a word (especially when the prefix ends in a vowel and the noun begins with a vowel):

- *Re-elect, pro-European, pre-eminent...*

To write the numbers from 21 to 99:

- *Seventy-one, sixty-four...*

BRACKETS

Round brackets, or parentheses in America, add information, clarify, explain and illustrate:

- *Star Wars (1979) was a masterpiece of science fiction.*
- *Snickers (formally known as Marathon) are available in all corner shops.*

Square brackets clarify the meaning of a direct quote without changing the words. They define 'it' and 'they':

- *He had taken it [the medicine] for quite a number of years.*

Extracts from:

Eats, shoots & leaves, Lynne Truss, 2003. Profile books Ltd, **Correct English**, J.E. Metcalfe and C. Astel, Clarion books and **Oxford Advanced Dictionary**, Oxford University Press, 1996