

Review of English Punctuation: Spaces, Quotations, and Parentheses

1. In general, put one space after punctuation.
2. In general, put no spaces before punctuation, but always put a space between words.
3. Exceptions.
 - Put two spaces after colons and between sentences.
 - Put no spaces after periods inside abbreviations.
 - Put no space before or after an apostrophe.
 - Put no space on the "inside" of quotation marks (often called "quotes").
 - Put no space on the "inside" of parentheses.
4. In general, put end-of-sentence punctuation inside quotation marks.
 - Note: Direct quotations are not used as much in English as in Japanese.
5. In general, put commas and other sentence punctuation outside of parentheses.
6. Put a comma (plus a space) before *and*, *but*, *or*, and *nor* when they join two sentences.
7. In general, if you use an adjective-plus-noun (or adverb-adjective) phrase to modify another noun the adjective and noun should be joined with a hyphen.
8. The semicolon (;) is not used widely in English and probably should be avoided by non-native writers.
9. Names of newspapers, books, movies, ships, magazines, journals, and poems are usually *italicized* or underlined.
10. Ellipsis (...) is used to show that something has been omitted.
11. For quotes within quotes, use single quotes.

Examples

1. One space after punctuation.
 - If you click here, the disk will be erased.
 - Mr. Tripp is always right.
2. No space before punctuation.
 - John, Mary, and I are going to try again next week.
 - The train is going to be late, I think.
3. Exceptions
 - A computer consists of four main parts: a CPU, an input device, an output device, and a memory unit.
 - University teachers generally have a Ph.D.
 - It's said that John's homework was eaten by his dog.
 - Many people confuse "affect" and "effect" in their writing.
 - The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) has a new director.
4. They asked, "Where are the horses?"
 - She said, "Could you wait here a moment?"
 - She asked if you could wait here a moment.
5. He built a computer called ABC (for Atanasoff-Berry Computer), but it was never marketed.
6. Newton discovered gravity, but Einstein discovered relativity.
7. It was a well-known procedure.
8. He used a two-part solution.

9. Funding for the project was ended; however, by moving money from another budget they were able to complete their work.
10. Columbus's ships were named the *Nina*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*.
11. Chomsky suggested that, "Language is a system that...can be described in an algebraic notation."
12. He wrote in 1946 that, "The key word in digital computer is 'digital'."

COMMAS

Rule 1. To avoid confusion, use commas to separate words and word groups with a series of three or more.

Example *My \$10,000,000 estate is to be split among my husband, daughter, son, and nephew.*

NOTE: Omitting the comma after son would indicate that the son and nephew would have to split one-third of the estate.

Rule 2. Use a comma to separate two adjectives when the word and can be inserted between them.

Examples *He is a strong, healthy man.*
 We stayed at an expensive summer resort.
 You would not say expensive and summer resort so no comma.

Rule 3. Use a comma when an *ly* adjective is used with other adjectives.

NOTE: To test if an *ly* word is an adjective, see if it can be used alone with the noun. If it can, use the comma.

Examples *Felix was a lonely, young boy.*
 I get headaches in brightly lit rooms.
 Brightly is not an adjective because it cannot be used alone with rooms; therefore, no comma is used between *brightly* and *lit*.

Rule 4. Use commas before or surrounding the name or title of a person directly addressed.

Examples *Will you, Shirley, do that assignment for me?*
 Yes, Doctor, I will.

NOTE: Capitalize a title when directly addressing someone.

Rule 5a. Use a comma to separate the day of the month from the year and after the year. Some businesses no longer use the comma after the year.

Example *Kathleen met her husband on December 5, 2003, in Mill Valley, California.*
 OR *Kathleen met her husband on December 5, 2003 in Mill Valley, California.*

Rule 5b. If any part of the date is omitted, leave out the comma.

Example *They met in December 2003 in Mill Valley.*

Rule 6. Use a comma to separate the city from the state and after the state. Some businesses no longer use the comma after the state.

Example *I lived in San Francisco, California, for 20 years.*
 OR *I lived in San Francisco, California for 20 years.*

Rule 7. Use commas to surround degrees or titles used with names.

Example *Al Mooney, M.D., knew Sam Sunny, Jr.*

NOTE: Sometimes people having names with Jr. attached do not use a comma before the

Jr. If they do not use the comma, then you should not.

Rule 8. Use commas to set off expressions that interrupt the flow of the sentence.

Example *I am, as you have probably noticed, very nervous about this.*

Rule 9. When starting a sentence with a weak clause, use a comma after it. Conversely, do not use a comma when the sentence starts with a strong clause followed by a weak clause.

Examples *If you are not sure about this, let me know now.*
Let me know now if you are not sure about this.

Rule 10. Use a comma after phrases of more than three words that begin a sentence.

Examples *To apply for this job, you must have previous experience.*
On February 14 many couples give each other candy or flowers.

Rule 11. If something or someone is sufficiently identified, the description following it is considered nonessential and should be surrounded by commas.

Examples *Freddy, who has a limp, was in an auto accident.*
Freddy is named so the description is not essential.

The boy who has a limp was in an auto accident.

We do not know which boy is being referred to without further description; therefore, no commas are used.

Rule 12. Use a comma to separate two strong clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction-and, or, but, for, nor. You can omit the comma if the clauses are both short.

Examples *I have painted the entire house, but he is still working on sanding the doors.*
I paint and he writes.

Rule 13. Use the comma to separate two sentences if it will help avoid confusion.

Example *I chose the colors red and green, and blue was his first choice.*

Rule 14. A comma splice is an error caused by joining two strong clauses with only a comma instead of separating the clauses with a conjunction, a semicolon, or a period. A comma splice creates what is known as a run-on sentence.

Incorrect *Time flies when we are having fun, we are always having fun.*
(Comma splice)

Correct *Time flies when we are having fun and we are always having fun.*
Time flies when we are having fun; we are always having fun.
Time flies when we are having fun. We are always having fun.

Rule 15. If the subject does not appear in front of the second verb, do not use a comma.

Example *He thought quickly when asked that difficult question but still did not answer correctly.*

Rule 16. Use commas to introduce or interrupt direct quotations shorter than three lines.

Examples *He actually said, "I do not care."*
"Why," I asked, "do you always forget to do it?"

Rule 17. Use a comma to separate a statement from a question.

Example *I can go, can't I?*

Rule 18. Use a comma to separate contrasting parts of a sentence.

Example *That is my money, not yours.*

Rule 19. Use a comma when beginning sentences with introductory words such as well, now, or yes.

Examples *Yes, I do need that report.*

Well, I never thought I'd live to see the day . . .

DASHES

En Dash

An **en dash**, which is a little longer than a hyphen, is used for periods of time when you might otherwise use *to*. With an en dash, spacing is dependent on your computer. On a PC, an en dash is made by using ALT + 0150 (hold down the ALT key and type 0150 on the numeric keypad), with a space before and after it. If you are using a Mac, press the option key and the hyphen key to form an en dash.

Example *The years 2001 – 2003*
January – June

Em Dash

Use an **em dash** sparingly in formal writing. Don't use it just because you are uncertain about correct punctuation. In informal writing, em dashes may replace commas, semicolons, colons, and parentheses to indicate added emphasis, an interruption, or an abrupt change of thought.

On a PC, an em dash is made by using ALT + 0151 (hold down the ALT key and type 0151 on the numeric keypad), with no spaces before or after. It looks like this: — On a Mac, an em dash is made by striking Option, Shift, Hyphen.

Example *You are the friend—the only friend—who offered to help me.*

Never have I met such a lovely person—before you.

I pay the bills—she has all the fun.

A semicolon would be used here in formal writing.

I need three items at the store—dog food, vegetarian chili, and cheddar cheese.

Remember, a colon would be used here in formal writing.

My agreement with Cathy is clear—she teaches me French and I teach her German.

Again, a colon would work here in formal writing.

Please call my agent—Jessica Cohen—about hiring me.

Parentheses would work just fine here instead of the dashes.

I wish you would— oh, never mind.

This shows an abrupt change in thought and warrants a dash. Notice the space after the dash because the first sentence is interrupted and then a new sentence begun.

PARENTHESES

Rule 1. Use parentheses to enclose words or figures that clarify or are used as an aside.

Examples *I expect five hundred dollars (\$500).*

He finally answered (after taking five minutes to think) that he did not understand the question.

Commas could have been used in the above example. Parentheses show less emphasis or importance. Em dashes, which could also have been used instead of parentheses, show emphasis.

Rule 2. You may use half parentheses to enclose numbers of listed items in a sentence.

Example *We need an emergency room physician who can 1) think quickly, 2) treat patients*

respectfully, and 3) handle complaints from the public.

Rule 3. Periods go inside parentheses only if an entire sentence is inside the parentheses.

Examples *Please read the analysis (I enclosed it as Attachment A.).*

OR

Please read the analysis. (I enclosed it as Attachment A.)

OR

Please read the analysis (Attachment A).

CAPITALIZATION

Rule 1. Capitalize the first word of a quoted sentence.

Examples *He said, "Treat her as you would your own daughter."
"Look out!" she screamed. "You almost ran into my child."*

Rule 2. Capitalize a proper noun.

Example *Golden Gate Bridge*

Rule 3. Capitalize a person's title when it precedes the name. Do not capitalize when the title is acting as a description following the name.

Examples *Chairperson Haines
Ms. Haines, the chairperson of the company, will address us at noon.*

Rule 4. Capitalize when the person's title follows the name on the address or signature line.

Examples *Sincerely,
Ms. Haines, Chairperson*

Rule 5. Capitalize the titles of high-ranking government officials when used with or without their names.

Examples *The President will address Congress.*

*All Senators are expected to attend.
Refers to national.*

The Governor, Lieutenant Governor, attorney general, and senators will attend.

The attorney general and state senators are considered lower-ranking officials although they might not like this designation.

*The governors and lieutenant governors called for a special task force.
These titles are being used as general descriptions here.*

NOTE: Be careful of people's egos when deciding whether to capitalize their titles. If concerned, capitalize.

Rule 6. Capitalize any title when used as a direct address.

Example *Will you take my temperature, Doctor?*

Rule 7. Capitalize points of the compass only when they refer to specific regions.

Examples *We have had three relatives visit from the South.*

Go south three blocks and then turn left.

*We live in the southeast section of town.
Southeast is just an adjective here describing section, so it should not be*

capitalized.

Rule 8. Capitalize titles of publications except for little words such as *a, an, the, but, as, if, and, or, nor*, when used internally. If these little words begin the title, capitalize them. Capitalize short verb forms such as *Is, Are, and Be*.

Examples *The Day of the Jackal*

What Color Is Your Parachute?

A Tale of Two Cities

Rule 9. Capitalize *federal* or *state* when used as part of an official agency name or in government documents where these terms represent an official name. If they are being used as general terms, you can use lower case letters.

Examples *The State has evidence to the contrary.*

That is a Federal offense. OR That is a federal offense.

The State Board of Equalization collects sales taxes.

We will visit three states during our summer vacation.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has been subject to much scrutiny and criticism lately.

Her business must comply with all county, state, and federal laws.

Rule 10. You may capitalize words such as *department, bureau, and office* if you have prepared your text in the following way:

Example *The Bureau of Land Management (Bureau) has some jurisdiction over Indian lands. The Bureau is finding its administrative role to be challenging.*

Rule 11. Do not capitalize names of seasons.

Example *I love autumn colors and spring flowers.*

Rule 12. Capitalize the first word of a salutation and the first word of a complimentary close.

Examples *Dear Ms. Franklin:*

My dear Mr. Smith:

Very truly yours,

Rule 13. Capitalize words derived from proper nouns.

Example *I must take English and math.*
English is capitalized because it comes from the proper noun *England* but *math* does not come from *mathland*.

Rule 14. Capitalize the names of specific course titles.

Example *I must take history and Algebra 2.*