



English Punctuation & Grammar Rules

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PUNCTUATION

General

- English punctuation rules should prevail over the source language's rules. Do not feel chained to the source language punctuation, as it can make the English less correct and less readable.
 - *Example: Italian uses colons where English would prefer a period or a semi-colon, or it prefers dashes where English prefers parentheses.*

Periods

- Each period should be followed by a single space.
 - *Example: This is an example. Please follow this format.*
- When parentheses or brackets are used to enclose an independent sentence, a period belongs inside the parentheses/brackets.
 - *Example: Bob was excited to buy his girlfriend flowers for her birthday. (He has never done this before.)*
 - *Example: [We went shopping.]*
- When parentheses or brackets are used to enclose an incomplete sentence, the period belongs outside the parentheses/brackets.
 - *Example: Bob was excited to buy his girlfriend flowers for her birthday (though he'd never done so before).*

Quotation Marks

- Use double quotation marks (" ") when quoting spoken words.
 - *Example: She asked him, "Can you stop by the store on your way home?"*
- Use single quotation marks (' ') only when there are quotes within quotes.
 - *Example: Bob explained, "I wanted to play music but then Sally said, 'No way!'"*
- Periods, commas (,), question marks (?), exclamation marks (!), etc., should remain inside the double quotation mark, unless the quoted phrase is independent from the punctuation.
 - *Example: Gandhi once said, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."*
 - *Example: Can you explain the quote, "An eye for an eye"?*

- Semicolons (;), colons (:), etc., should remain outside double quotation mark.
 - Example: *The lawyer objected citing the following: "It was an interesting point and a great story, but lacked substance."*
 - Example: *The homeless man exclaimed "Death to America"; there was no reaction from the crowd.*

Commas

- Use a comma at the end of a list of items to differentiate between words and word groups.
 - Example: *"She told an improbable story about her father, a shoe thief and a mango farmer." (Father is both footwear thief and tropical fruit grower.)*
 - Example: *"She told an improbable story about her father, a shoe thief, and a mango farmer." (Story is about three different people.)*
- Use a comma to separate two adjectives, or if the word "and" can be inserted.
 - Example: *I bought my niece a big, furry polar bear stuffed animal.*
 - Example: *He bought an expensive luxury car. ("expensive and luxury car" does not make sense, so a comma cannot be used.)*
- Use a comma at the end of the words etc., i.e., and e.g.
 - Example: *Today, my great-grandfather became a centenarian, i.e., he had his 100th birthday.*
 - Example: *I enjoy all types of Japanese food (e.g., sushi, tempura, soba noodles)*

Semicolons

- Use a semicolon to connect two independent clauses.
 - Example: *There are 30 pages to the proposal; don't get discouraged.*
- Use a semicolon for a list of items that contain internal punctuation.
 - Example: *We traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana; San Francisco, California; and Seattle, Washington.*

Question Marks

- Do not use question marks in indirect speech.
 - Example: *The manager asked when the delegation would arrive.*

Exclamation Marks

- Avoid using exclamation marks in formal texts.

Apostrophes

- Apostrophes are used to mark possession
 - Example: *David's car [singular] and Bess's drill [singular ending in s]*
 - Example: *children's playground [plural noun] and footballers' wives [plural ending in s]*
- Apostrophes are also used to mark where a letter or letters have been left out
 - Example: *don't=> do not or can't=> cannot*
 - Example: *it's => it is.* (Do not use "it's" for a possessive.)

Ellipsis

- Ellipsis in English is always marked by three dots.
- If the ellipsis comes at the end of a sentence do not add a fourth period.
 - Example: *He reached for his knife...*
 - Example: *Is that ... a pineapple?!*

Spacing

- Use only one space following (but not preceding) periods, commas, semicolons, colons, exclamation points, question marks, and quotation marks. However, no spaces are used on either side of a hyphen.
 - Example: *I bought twenty-one colors of nail polish: nine blues, seven reds, and five greens.*

GRAMMAR

Compound Words

- Avoid hyphenating nouns where possible and make compound words either with or without a space.
 - Example: *Breakdown (not break-down)*
- Use a hyphen only to clarify meaning.

- *Example: Man-eating shark vs. man eating shark*

A vs. An

- The pronunciation of the word dictates whether you use “a” or “an,” not whether first letter of the word is a vowel or consonant.
- Use “a” for the following: pronounced h, long u (or eu), and the word one.
 - *Example: a utopia, a horse*
 - *Example: an introduction, an hour*

Capitalization

- Capitalize a person's title if it precedes their name, and lowercase the title if it follows the name.
 - *Example: President Barack Obama vs. Barack Obama, the president*
- Capitalize language names.
 - *Example: the English language, German-speaking customers, Japanese students*
- Capitalize names and abbreviated names of government, non-government, and business positions and offices.
 - *Example: United States Supreme Court vs. Supreme Court, Chief Executive Officer vs. CEO*
- Capitalize the first word of a quotation that is a full sentence.
 - *Example: She asked him, "Can you stop by the store on your way home?"*
- In titles and headlines, capitalize all nouns, pronouns, verbs, and all other words of four or more letters.
 - *Example: Supplier Under Scrutiny on Aging Arms for Afghans*

Currency

- Leave numbers in their numerical form and use a currency symbol instead of writing out the currency name. Also, include the country of origin if the currency is used in multiple countries.
 - *Example: US\$1,000 (not 1,000 US Dollars)*
 - *Example: ¥1,000 (not 1,000 yen)*

Proper Nouns

- How a proper noun is translated depends on the information being transmitted. The deciding factor is how translating the proper noun affects the reader's ability to identify the specific place/thing being referenced.
 - *Example: Herr Tiger Smith -> Mr. Tiger Smith*
 - *Example: Krankenhaus Waldfriede -> Waldfriede Hospital*
 - *Example: Römerstraße 7, Köln -> Römerstraße 7, Cologne*

Subject – Verb Agreement

- A single subject should be accompanied by a single verb, while a plural subject should be accompanied by a plural verb.
 - *Example: The list of items is on the desk.*
 - *Example: All the items are on the table.*

Who/That/Which

- Who refers to people. That and which refer to groups or things.
 - *Example: Angela is the one who scored the final goal.*
 - *Example: She was on the team that won first place.*
- That is used to introduce an essential clause, while which is used to introduce a nonessential clause.
 - *Example: I do not trust products that claim "all natural ingredients" because this phrase can mean almost anything.*
 - *Example: The product claiming "all natural ingredients", which appeared in the Sunday newspaper, is on sale.*
- Essential clauses do not have commas surrounding them while nonessential clauses are surrounded by commas.