

IMPROVING YOUR PUNCTUATION

Punctuation marks are symbols given to a reader to show how a sentence is constructed and how it should be read.

The most important punctuation marks are:

Full stop .

Comma ,

Colon :

Apostrophe '

This worksheet provides tips on how to use all four correctly

Punctuation doesn't have to be an uphill struggle!



Full Stop

A full stop has **only one use**: to end a sentence.

Ensure any sentence is complete before you put in a full-stop. A sentence is defined as "one complete unit of thought". It should have at least one **subject** (who or what the sentence is about) and a **verb** telling you what each subject is doing.

e.g. "The **boy** **kicked** the ball."



More complex examples:

1. "The **captain**, whose skilful ball control has won him ten international caps, which is a record never before achieved by anyone of his age." **(INCORRECT sentence as there is no verb to tell us what the captain is actually doing)**
2. "The **captain**, whose skilful ball control has won him ten international caps, **kicked** the ball." **(CORRECT sentence thanks to the verb in pink)**

*****Remember, when you use a full stop the word that follows and starts the next sentence should always start with a capital letter.**

Comma

A comma has three main uses:

- 1) To separate items on a list
- 2) To add a phrase that gives extra (but not essential) information
- 3) To show where there is a pause

1. Separating items on a list

This is the easiest way to use commas.

e.g. "The shopping trolley was loaded high with bottles of beer, fruit, vegetables, toilet rolls, cereals and cartons of milk."



Note that in a list, the final two items are linked by the word 'and' rather than by a comma.

If there are only two items in a list you would use "and" rather than a comma

2. Adding a Phrase That Isn't Essential

In the below example the phrase between the commas gives us more information about the actions of the girl, the subject of the sentence:

"The girl, who knew that her mother was about to arrive, ran quickly towards the house."

Note that if the phrase was removed, the sentence would still make sense - "The girl ran quickly towards the house."

This is an excellent way to add more information to a sentence without it becoming too complicated!



3. Using a comma to show where there is a pause

Commas tell the reader when to pause when reading something aloud:

e.g. "In conclusion, I think that this idea is interesting, though it might need to be developed further."

Sometimes telling readers where to pause can be really important to the meaning of a sentence. Both of the below examples contain the same words but have very different meanings!

"Let's eat, grandpa." (it's time to eat with grandpa)

"Let's eat grandpa." (it's time to eat grandpa! No wonder he looks worried!)



*****Final tip: be wary of using commas where you should use a full stop. This is a common mistake. If you think there is a "big pause" when you read something and what comes before the pause is a complete unit of thought (a **subject** **doing** something) then a full stop will usually be better.**

Apostrophe

The apostrophe, sometimes called an inverted comma, has two main uses.

1. The apostrophe indicates possession or ownership.

e.g. "The girl's hat was green" (when talking about one girl).

- "The girls' hats were green" (girls in this instance are plural, i.e. more than one girl, more than one hat).



This indicates that the hats belong to the girls, but make sure you avoid the common mistake of using an apostrophe for plurals when there is no ownership

- e.g. "the girls went out" has no apostrophe, it is just a plural (more than one girl)

2. Apostrophe used to show where a letter is left out:

e.g. "We're going to do this course."

(We are going to do this course.)

"Isn't this a fine example of punctuation?"

(Is not this a fine example of punctuation?)

*****Note that a common mistake is to confuse "its" with "it's".**

- "It's" indicates to the reader that a letter has been omitted.
- e.g. "It's a lovely day" is an abbreviated way of saying: "It is a lovely day".

If unsure which to use read the sentence aloud and use the full "it is" - e.g. "The cow went back into it is shed" doesn't make sense, so you'll know in that case it should be "its" rather than "it's"

We hope this study skills sheet was helpful. If you have any questions or would like more support improving your punctuation please contact studyskills@dumgal.ac.uk or drop into the Point and ask for an Educational Support Worker

You can access more in-depth guidance on punctuation using [this link](#)