

Punctuation

Punctuation marks, such as commas, periods, and quotation marks, help readers interpret sentences. They determine how a sentence should be read and understood. Like most languages, English has certain rules of punctuation. The guidelines below will help you master some of the most important ones.

Periods

- Use a period at the end of a statement:
Argentina's economy is a mix of agriculture and industry.
- Use a period with most abbreviations:
Mr. A.M.
Mrs. P.M.
Apt. assoc.
M.A.

Question Mark

- Use a question mark at the end of a direct question:
Who is going to drive me to the airport?

Comma

- Use a comma to separate words or phrases in a series:
The sea around Antarctica is home to dolphins, porpoises, whales, seals, and other sea creatures.
- Use a comma to separate independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction:
We left in plenty of time, but we still missed the bus.
I worked hard all day, so I went to bed early.
- Use a comma after many introductory phrases or clauses:
Working late into the night, I drank several cups of strong coffee.
- Use a comma before a direct quote:
Christina said, "The train leaves in half an hour."
- Use a comma between the day of the month and the year:
August 15, 1983
- Use a comma to separate cities from states:
Billings, Montana.
Tallahassee, Florida.

Colon

- Use a colon to introduce series:
Consumer products can be classified into three categories: convenience products, shopping products, and specialty products.
- Use a colon to introduce a long or formal quotation:
Writing about his life, British philosopher Bertrand Russel said: “Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and the unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind”

Note: The first colon is used to introduce the quotation; the second one introduces a series:

- Use a colon to separate hours from minutes:
8:30
12:47
- Use a colon after the salutation in a formal letter:
Dear Dr. Brody:
Dear Mrs. Rosen:

Quotation Marks

- Use a quotation marks to enclose a direct quote:
Jorge said, “I have already finished my homework.”
- Use quotation marks to identify titles of songs, short stories, poems, articles, essays, and chapters from a book. (Underline the titles of longer works should be in italic type)
My favorite song is “Imagine” by John Lennon.