

An Introduction to Punctuation

An English teacher wrote these words on the board:

a woman without her man is nothing
and directed the students to punctuate it correctly.

The men wrote:

"A woman, without her man, is nothing."

The women wrote:

"A woman; without her, man is nothing."

PUNCTUATION IS IMPORTANT!!!

The punctuation marks are:-

- full stop (in the USA, it is called a *period*)

, comma

Bob's apostrophe

: colon

; semicolon

? question mark

! exclamation mark

/ slash, or oblique

. . . ellipse

“ _ _ _ _ ” quotation marks

(_ _ _ _ _) brackets or parentheses

- dash or em-dash

car-park hyphen

Punctuation written with a capital 'P'

PUNCTUATION written in upper case

punctuation written in lower case

Some Simple Rules

A **full stop** or **period** shows the end of a sentence. It is also used after initials and abbreviations:

- Peter Pan was written by J. M. Barrie.

A **comma** separates parts of a sentence, or words in a list, or shows additional information:

- Peter, who is eighteen, loves swimming, tennis, and football. He lives in London, the English capital.

An **apostrophe** replaces a missing letter or letters in contracted forms:

- I'd (= I had, or I would), isn't (= is not).
- We also use apostrophes before or after the possessive with 's': Phuong's party.

A **colon** tells the reader that something is coming next, for example a list:

- People go to the cinema for many reasons: to meet friends, to be entertained, or to be educated.

A **semi-colon** is used to divide two parts of a sentence:

- She looked up and frowned; the boy ran away.

A **capital letter** is used at the start of each new sentence. You also use capitals for proper nouns, names of people and places, titles of films and books, etc.:

- Viet and Phuong saw 'Atonement' at the Megastar, Vincom Towers, when they were in Hanoi.

A **question mark** is used at the end of a direct question:

- 'Can you drive?' he asked.

An **exclamation mark** is used at the end of a sentence to show surprise, joy, anger, or shock:

- 'Don't speak to me like that!' she shouted.
- 'What a lovely present!' he said.
- 'Ow! That hurt!' she cried.

A **slash** or **oblique** is used to show two alternatives, and also in web addresses.

- He/she should be a good communicator.
- <http://www.bbclearningenglish.com>

An **ellipsis** is used either to show that some text is missing from a quote, or to provide tension in reported speech.

- The Colosseum . . . is in Rome.
- He looked up, and . . . there was a strange man at the door!

Quotation marks, (**speech marks**, or **inverted commas**) are used to show words that are spoken:

- The teacher described his behaviour as 'infantile'.
Speech marks go outside the words spoken by the speaker. The spoken words are divided from the reporting verb by a comma, and a full stop comes at the end.
- 'I'm scared,' said Michael.
- Michael said, 'I'm scared.'

Brackets or **parentheses** are used when the writer adds information, an explanation, a comment etc. to something in the text. The text would still make sense if the information in brackets was removed:

- Queen Mary 2 (the largest ocean liner in the world) entered Sydney Harbour today.

A **dash** or **em-dash** is used when an additional comment or information is added to a sentence:

- Peter is usually - but not always - late for school.

A **hyphen** is used in many cases where two words have been joined together to form one word

- car-park swimming-pool kind-hearted

It is also used to separate long words that will not fit on one line.

Correct and clear punctuation is especially important in the IELTS exam!