Punctuation Basics

Girls night out?

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http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/images/Alcohol_g182-Red_Cocktail_p399

Why worry about punctuation?

Punctuation helps the reader to understand the meaning of your sentences. In this resource you will find out about some of the basics of punctuation, especially aspects which are important in academic writing.

Punctuation styles vary. You will find, for instance, that some rules in American usage differ from those in British usage. Whichever style you choose to follow, use it consistently. In this resource we have followed APA punctuation guidelines.[1]

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[1] For simplicity, most example sentences in this resource have not been referenced. Sentences containing direct quotes have been referenced to illustrate APA referencing conventions. For sources of quoted and paraphrased material, see p. 18).

Capital letters

Capital letters are used for

1. The first letter of a proper noun (e.g. name of person or place)
For example,

    Canterbury   Smith   November

2. Referring to oneself as "I"

3. The first word of a sentence

4. The main words in titles

For example,

    The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment has announced a new programme to encourage energy efficiency.

    The Sustainable Energy Conference will be held in November.

5. The beginning of a quote, <u>if</u> it is a full sentence
(See p. 12 for how to use quotation marks.)

For example,

    Jørgensen (2008) challenges the notion of cars as providing freedom: "Unrestricted mobility in time and space is really an illusion; boundless individual mobility does not exist today" (p. 102).

Commas

Commas help the writer to communicate clearly and unambiguously. By separating a sentence into sections, commas clarify the meaning and make the sentence easier to read.

Commas are used in five main ways

1. To separate two independent clauses joined by a co-ordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)

Independent clause	**,** co-ordinating conjunction	independent clause

An independent clause, or main clause, is a statement that could stand on its own as a separate sentence. In other words, it is a group of words containing a subject and a verb and expressing a complete thought. Two independent clauses can be joined with a connecting word, called a co-ordinating conjunction, to make a longer sentence. Put a comma before the co-ordinating conjunction. [2]

For example,

> *The coverage and capacity of EV charging infrastructure has been increasing**,** but further infrastructural developments are needed.*

> *The first referendum on the New Zealand electoral system was held in 1992**,** and the binding referendum took place the following year.*

> *Gas turbines derived from aircraft engine technology are modular in design**, so** they can be installed quickly.*

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[2] If you would like to know more about types of clauses and other aspects of sentence structure, see our resources on sentence structure.

2. To separate an introductory word, phrase or clause from the rest of the sentence

| Introductory word, phrase or clause | **,** | independent clause |

Sometimes an introductory word, phrase or clause is placed before the main part of the sentence (the independent clause). Put a comma after the introductory word, phrase, or clause.

For example,

After a word

> *Overall**,** more sites had negative relationships between colony size and the distance to the nearest colony location.*

> *However**,** establishing indigenous forest in open pasture through reliance on natural regeneration can be a challenging task.*

After a phrase [3]

> *In addition**,** research in New Zealand demonstrates that EV owners very commonly use their EVs in holiday travel.*

> *According to Jørgensen (2008)**,** "unrestricted mobility in time and space is really an illusion; boundless individual mobility does not exist today" (p. 102).*

> *From the early days of private motoring**,** access to petrol cars has been instrumental in the development of cultures of leisure travel.*

After a dependent clause

> *While some studies report that people get used to their EV's range**,** others report that limited range becomes more problematic for some people over time.*

> *Although exotic forest has a higher value for provisioning services**,** indigenous forest has a higher overall value of ecosystem services.*

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[3] If the introductory phrase is short, you can omit the comma; however, it is usually included after transition phrases such as "in addition"

3. To separate "extra" (non-essential) information from the rest of the sentence.

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                            ,  extra information  ,
Independent                         ▲                    clause
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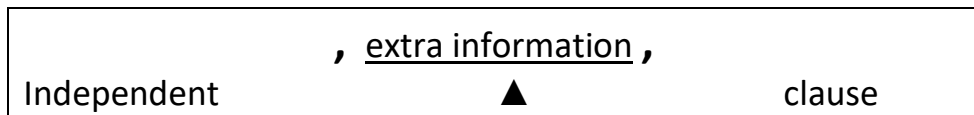
Sometimes a word, phrase, or clause containing extra information is inserted into a sentence. This information is not essential to the meaning of the sentence. Put a comma before and after the "extra information" word, phrase, or clause.

For example,

> *Systemic changes**,** <u>however</u>**,** have profound implications for mobility.*

> *Forests**,** <u>extremely diverse biological communities</u>**,** produce a range of products.*

> *Parks and reserves**,** <u>where human activity is theoretically strictly controlled</u>**,** are an essential component of conventional habitat conservation.*

Note. Not all clauses beginning with *which, where* or *who* contain "extra information". Some contain "essential" information and are not separated by commas.[4] Look at the punctuation, and different meanings, in these two sentences:

> *1. The city's parks and reserves **,** which are under the control of the Christchurch City Council **,** are being considered as sites for cellphone towers.*

> *2. Parks and reserves which are under the control of the Christchurch City Council are being considered as sites for cellphone towers.*

In sentence 1, <u>all</u> the parks and reserves are under the control of the CCC and <u>all</u> are being considered as potential sites.

In sentence 2, only <u>some</u> of Christchurch's parks and reserves are under the control of the CCC; only those parks and reserves controlled by the CCC are being considered potential sites. This could also be written as:
- *Parks and reserves that are under the control of the Christchurch City Council are being considered as sites for cellphone towers.   **or***
- *Parks and reserves under the control of the Christchurch City Council are being considered as sites for cellphone towers.*

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[4] For more resources on "extra" and "essential" information clauses, ask a Learning Advisor.

4. To separate a final phrase from the rest of the sentence

Independent clause	**,**	extra information or linking word/phrase
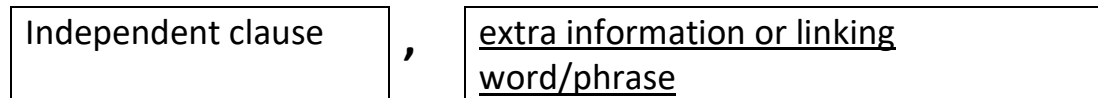
Sometimes an "extra" piece of information (or a linking word or phrase) is added to the end of a sentence. Put a comma before the extra information.

For example

> *A recent collaborative international study highlighted the negative outcomes that can be associated with exotic monoculture plantations**,** <u>including the displacement of indigenous biodiversity.</u>*

> *Relying on natural regeneration is the preferred and most economically viable method for establishing permanent indigenous forest, <u>particularly on marginal hill country.</u>*

> *Forest cover is rapidly declining in Europe**,** for example.*

5. To separate items in a series (of three or more items)

For example,

> *Systemic changes have profound implications for mobility**,** spontaneity**,** trip planning**,** and routine.*

The final comma (before the "and") is called an *Oxford comma* or a *serial comma*. It is used in APA style, but not in all styles. Even if the style you use does not **require** an Oxford comma, sometimes it is used to avoid ambiguity.

Semicolons

A semicolon is used in two ways

1. To link two closely related sentences

When two sentences are closely related in meaning, you can use a semicolon to join them (rather than use a full stop to separate them). The semicolon highlights the fact that there is a close relationship between the two sentences.

You can use a semicolon on its own to link two independent clauses (sentences).

Independent clause	**;**	independent clause

For example,

> *On a regional basis, South America has the highest percentage of vegetated land in undisturbed areas; Europe has the lowest, almost all of it in the northern countries.*

You can also use a semicolon before a linking word or phrase. [5]

Independent clause	**;** linking word or phrase **,**	independent clause

For example,

> *The threat pesticides pose to human health is particularly potent in the developing world, where most serious exposure occurs; in fact, pesticide poisoning represents a major occupational hazard for farmers and their families.*

2. To separate sections of a list

Sometimes, using commas between items in a list would not be enough to clearly separate those items, especially when the individual items already contain commas. In this situation, you need the "extra strength" of the semicolon to show the reader where one item finishes and the next begins.

For example,

> *Scientists define biodiversity at several levels: genetic diversity, the variation between individuals and between populations within a species; species diversity, the different types of plants, animals, and other life forms within a region; and community or ecosystem diversity, the variety of habitats found within an area.*

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[5] Connecting words like "but" and "however" have similar meanings, but different punctuation rules. To find out more about how to use linking words and phrases, see our resource on transition signals or ask a Learning Advisor.

Colons

A colon is used to introduce material which explains or adds detail.

| Independent clause | : | independent clause, list or quote |

There are three common situations in which you can use a colon

1. To introduce an explanation, clarification or extra detail
For example,

> Ranchers regard their use of the land as a public service*: they keep the land in production and provide a valuable commodity for the American market.*

> Most of the world's biodiversity is located in the tropics*: more than two thirds of the world's species live in tropical zones.*

2. To introduce a list or series
For example,

> Of the forest cover around the world, over half is in five countries*: the Russian Federation, Brazil, Canada, the United States and China.*

> Scientists define biodiversity at several levels*: genetic diversity, species diversity, and ecosystem diversity.*

3. To introduce a quote of 40 words or longer
For example,

> Jørgensen (2008) challenges the notion of cars as providing freedom*: "Unrestricted mobility in time and space is really an illusion; boundless individual mobility does not exist today" (p. 102).*

> As car use and leisure travel grew, the association between them was cemented, as Ivory and Genus (2011) explain:

>> The car, from its establishment at the end of the nineteenth century, has been associated with the notion of travel for pleasure. Travel for pleasure was a critical aspect of how the car was understood and consumed and a key element in emerging car culture. (p. 1114)

Apostrophes

Apostrophes have two main uses

1. To show possession
This is where the most confusion arises. Remember the following rules.

(a) When to use an apostrophe to show possession

- Use an apostrophe after the name of a person or thing to which something belongs

  For example,
  the essay*'s* title = the title belonging to the essay
  New Zealand*'s* economy = the economy belonging to New Zealand

- Use an apostrophe after indefinite pronouns (such as *someone, anybody, everyone, no one, each other, someone else)*

  For example,
  someone*'s* property = property belonging to someone
  anyone*'s* opinion = an opinion belonging to anyone
  someone else*'s* idea = an idea belonging to someone else

(b) When NOT to use an apostrophe

- Do not use an apostrophe to show possession with possessive pronouns (such as *his, hers, yours, ours, theirs, its, mine)*. These words already show possession.

  For example,
  Here is his pen.
  This book is mine but that one is yours.
  The company increased its profits.

(c) Where to put the apostrophe to show possession

- In most cases add *'s* after the original word

    For example,
    With singular nouns
    the essay's title = the title of the essay
    the woman's office = the office belonging to the woman
    the boss's office = the office belonging to the boss

    With plural nouns not ending in *s*
    the people's voice = the voice of the people
    the women's refuge = the refuge belonging to the women

- But, for plural nouns ending in *s* you need to add only *'*

    For example,
    the companies' statements = the statements belonging to the companies
    the businesses' profits = the profit of the businesses
    two weeks' salary = the salary for two weeks

2. To show that part of a word is missing

For example,
who's = who is	*can't = can not*
let's = let us	*there's = there is*
it's = it is	*you're = you are* [6]

These types of words, however, are informal. In academic writing, you should always write these words in full (for example, do not, will not, cannot, it is).

Note – *it's* is only used when it means *it is*

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[6] **"*you're*"** and **"*your*"** are often confused. Remember that "*you're*" is an abbreviated form of "*you are*", just as "*it's*" is an abbreviated form of "*it is*". If you confuse similar words, such as you're/your, there/their/they're, talk to a Learning Advisor about strategies to avoid confusion.

Quotation marks

Quotation marks are used

1. To identify direct quotes

(a) When to use quotation marks with quotes
If you include a short direct quote in your writing, enclose it in quotation marks.

For example,

> *Contemporary forms of drive tourism must **"retain their sense of fun, flexibility and freedom"** (Fjelstul & Fyall, <u>2015</u>, p. 469) as they transition to more sustainable models.*

If you include a relatively long quote (in APA style, 40 words or more), start the quote on a new line and indent it. No quotation marks are necessary.

For example,

> *As car use and leisure travel grew, the association between them was cemented, as Ivory and Genus (2011) explain:*
>
>> *The car, from its establishment at the end of the nineteenth century, has been associated with the notion of travel for pleasure. Travel for pleasure was a critical aspect of how the car was understood and consumed and a key element in emerging car culture. (p. 1114)*

(b) Where to place punctuation marks with quotes
The rules for placing punctuation marks inside and outside quoted material are complex, but in general:

- Put any punctuation marks which are <u>part of the original quote</u> ***inside*** the quotation marks.
  For example,
  *The report sought to answer the following question: "What motivates people to choose ANR as a strategy to restore degraded land and forests**?**".*

- Put any punctuation marks <u>related to your sentence as a whole</u> ***outside*** the quotation marks.

  For example,

  *Fjelstul and Fyall (2015) argue that contemporary forms of drive tourism must "retain their sense of fun, flexibility and freedom" (p. 469)**,** but a considerable body of literature challenges simplistic conceptualisations of freedom.*

- When a sentence contains your words as well as a quote, put the <u>final full stop</u> ***after*** the quotation marks (and after any citation). This avoids having two full stops if the quote itself contains a full stop.

  For example,

  *Bladh (2019) notes that "a car with touring capacity became 'the car', the dominant expectation, which marginalized other types of cars" (p. 154)**.***

2. To highlight uncommon words or unusual uses of a word, or to distinguish words in a sentence

For example,

Some stakeholders may regard the purchase of green power as a token effort or "green washing".

*Many students confuse the words **"effect"** and **"affect"**.*

*The term **"rangelands"** refers to land on which native vegetation is predominantly grasses, forbs, and shrubs.*

3. To indicate titles

For example,

*The theme of **"World Resources 1994-95"** was biodiversity.*

Double or single?

Traditionally double quotation marks (**"…"**) have been the most commonly used, with single quotation marks (**'…'**) being used to denote a quote within a quote.

For example,

*Bladh (2019) notes that **"**a car with touring capacity became **'**the car**'**, the dominant expectation, which marginalized other types of cars**"** (p. 154)**.***

In many modern publications, single quotation marks are used, with double quotation marks being used for a quote within a quote. You should choose one style and use it consistently.

Parentheses ( )

Use parentheses sparingly in academic writing. Avoid using them to include comments or statements essential to the meaning of the sentence: if the idea is important enough to be in your paper, put it in the "main" part of the sentence.

Parentheses have three main uses

1. To enclose additional information not essential to the meaning or the grammar of the sentence

For example,

> *The Brazilian examples are located in three biomes **(**the Atlantic Forest, the Amazon Forest, and the Brazilian Savanna**)** that encompass eight states and cover all of Brazil's major regions.*

2. To add a fact, such as a name, a number, an abbreviation or a source

For example,

> *The Commissioner for the Environment **(**Simon Upton**)** has announced a new programme to ….*
>
> *Keedwell (2002) found black-fronted terns reused all four colony sites which had high chick survival **(**>20 chicks fledged**)** in the previous breeding season.*
>
> *The Department of Conservation **(**DOC**)** has suggested that …*
>
> *Bergin & Kimberley **(**2014**)** found that regeneration of totara (Podocarpus totara) in the presence of grazing was more prevalent on steeper slopes.*

3. To enclose numbers or letters in a numbered list

For example,

> *Price premiums for certificates may be lower than those for renewable electricity products, for several reasons: **(1)** RECs have no geographic constraints; **(2)** the supplier does not have to deliver the power to the REC purchaser; and **(3)** the supplier is not responsible for meeting the purchaser's electricity needs on a real-time basis.*

Brackets [   ]

Brackets are used to show changes in wording in a quote

Use brackets when you add or change the wording of a direct quote to make its meaning clearer or to make it fit smoothly into your sentence. Enclosing the changes in **[ ]** shows that they are not part of the original quote.

For example,

Original text

> *Although it requires less financial investment, ANR projects demand intense and continuous management from local communities to maintain the regenerating areas until the necessary species can thrive on their own. Therefore, they have to heavily invest in building social capital. (Alves et al., 2022, p.5)*

As quoted in your paper

> *Alves et al. (2022, p.5) point out that, because ANR projects require intensive input from local communities, "[funders] have to heavily invest in building social capital".*

Dashes

Dashes are usually considered informal punctuation marks, so use them sparingly in academic writing. Dashes can perform a similar function to parentheses, commas and colons, but tend to be used to make a stronger break in the sentence.

Dashes have two main uses

1. To add "extra" information to a clause
(Instead of parentheses or commas)

For example,
> *A collection of approaches – called assisted natural regeneration (ANR) – seeks to remove human-caused environmental disturbances.*
>
> *The Brazilian examples are located in three biomes – the Atlantic Forest, the Amazon Forest, and Cerrado (Brazilian Savanna) – that encompass eight states and cover all of Brazil's major regions.*

In the second example, notice how the "additional" information contains commas. In this case, separating the additional information from the rest of the sentence with dashes, rather than with commas, helps to avoid ambiguity.

2. To emphasise a phrase or clause, or to add a comment
(Instead of a colon)

For example,
> *Most of the world's biodiversity is located in the tropics – more than two thirds of the world's species live in tropical zones.*

Punctuation in abbreviations

These guidelines are based on APA style, but there are several acceptable styles for punctuating abbreviations. Whichever style you choose, use it consistently.

1. Use full stops in abbreviations written in lower case letters only, or with only an initial capital letter.

For example

a.m./p.m.	*p. (page)*	*Jan.*
e.g..	*pp. (pages)*	*Mon.*
et al..	*etc.*	*Ed.*

Note.

* Abbreviations such as e.g. , i.e. , and & are usually used only in figures, tables, footnotes, or parentheses. In the main body of your text, write them in full (*for example, that is, and*).

* et al. is used in the body of the text as well as in parentheses.

* In et al. *,* only the *"al."* is an abbreviation, so there is no full stop after "et"

2. Do not use full stops in these abbreviations:

* Symbols or units of measurement
  For example,

sq m	*min (minute)*	*°C*
km	*hr (hour)*	*p (probability)*

* Acronyms (a word formed from the first letter of each word of the name of an organisation etc.)
  For example,

ASEAN	*UNESCO*	*NATO*

* Personal titles
  For example,

Mr	*Ms*	*Dr*

* Abbreviations consisting of more than one capital letter
  For example

MSc	*PTO*	*USA*	*BC*

For more detail …

If you would like to know more about why and how we use punctuation, ask a Learning Advisor about other resources and the workshops and individual appointments we offer.

For more detail on APA style, see:
American Psychological Association. (2019). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

References
Some examples in this resource are paraphrases or quotes from one of the sources below. In academic writing, all quotes and paraphrases should include a citation (reference), but some citations in this resource have been omitted to highlight punctuation conventions more clearly. (If you are unsure about referencing, read our handout "Referencing: Why, when & how".)

Alves, J., Oliveira, M., Chazdon, R., Calmon, M., Pinto, A., Darvin, E., & Pereira, B. (2022). *The Role of Assisted Natural Regeneration in Accelerating Forest and Landscape Restoration: Practical Experiences from the Field*. São Paulo: WRI Brasil. https://files.wri.org/d8/s3fs-public/2022-03/assisted-natural-regeneration-accelerating-forest-landscape-restoration-EN_1.pdf?VersionId=F_5EhIBMXzlZ1AaK3IjWpicTvoUSprND

Fitt, H. (2022). Boring and inadequate? A literature review considering the use of electric vehicles in drive tourism. *Current Issues in Tourism, 25*(12), 1920-1946. https:// doi.org/ 10.1080/13683500.2021.1937074

Hamblin, C. (2017). *Colony dynamics and social attraction in black-fronted terns, Chlidonias albostriatus* [Masters Thesis, Lincoln University]. Research@Lincoln. https://hdl.handle.net/10182/8796

Pedley, D. (2022). *Natural regeneration of woody vegetation in pastoral hill country: A case study of Oashore Station, Banks Peninsula* [Masters Thesis, Lincoln University]. Research@Lincoln. https://hdl.handle.net/10182/15025

World Resources Institute. (1994). *World Resources 1994-5*. Oxford: OUP.