# Punctuation summary

## Introduction

Punctuation marks help you organise your words into larger chunks of information, such as clauses and sentences. They also communicate a range of ideas to the reader, including how information is grouped, where to pause and they can signal emphasis.

## A review of punctuation marks

### End marks   .      ?      !

End marks are used to end a sentence, indicating the reader where a distinct idea is complete. You can end your sentence with a full stop for a statement and a question mark for a question. Exclamation marks are usually not used in academic writing

### Commas      ,

Commas have a range of functions. Grammatically, they indicate sentence structure, such as the introduction of a dependent clause in sentences beginning *if/although*. They are used to separate introductory elements before a main clause. They also separate items in a list and indicate non-essential content.

### Colons and semicolons   :      ;

Colons introduce a key point or list. In American English, this function is often replace with a dash. In these cases, they replace a full stop. In academic texts, they can be used to separate the main heading and the subheading.

The semicolon has two key functions. They can replace a full stop to indicate that two sentences are closely related by meaning. They can also replace a full stop to introduce linking words like *however/as result/consequentl*y. The second function is to separate items in a list which already includes commas. In some referencing systems, the semicolon is used to separate two or more citations at the end of the sentence.

### Apostrophes        ‘

The single apostrophe has two functions. It can indicate possession and it also indicates when two words are joined together. Note that contractions are avoided in academic writing.

### Quotation marks           “

Quotation marks indicate direct speech. They can be a single or double apostrophe. Check which style is common in your discipline and be consistent in your use.

### Parentheses/brackets

Brackets indicate explanatory or interrupting material, or content that is not essential for the meaning of the sentence. This is the same function as commas and, in American English, the dash.

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## Dashes and hyphens

As previously mentioned, the dash can replace the comma or bracket to indicate non-essential information. They can also replace a colon to introduce a key word or point.

Hyphens have a grammatical function. They are used to form compound words.

## Ellipsis

Ellipsis is used in academic writing indicate that some words/sentences have been left out of a direct quotation to make the quotation more concise.

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