

What is punctuation?

PUNCTUATION REFERS TO THE MARKS USED IN WRITING THAT HELP READERS UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE READING.

Sometimes words alone are not enough to convey a writer's message clearly. They need a little help from punctuation marks to illustrate relationships between words, pauses, or even emotions.

Several of the main **punctuation marks** also have **uses** in **mathematical** notation.

Punctuation marks

There are twelve commonly used punctuation marks. Using punctuation marks correctly and carefully makes it possible for a writer to convey his or her message clearly. Punctuation can also enable the writer to control whether text is read quickly or slowly.

Period

This marks the end of a sentence.

EXAMPLE

The dog slept.



Ellipsis

This represents an unfinished sentence or omitted text.

EXAMPLE

Everything seemed calm, but then...



Comma

This joins or separates elements in a sentence.

EXAMPLE

Hearing a cat, he jumped up.

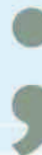


Semicolon

This joins two main clauses or separates items in a list.

EXAMPLE

He ran after the cat; it ran up a tree.



Colon

This introduces text in a sentence.

EXAMPLE

He was interested in one thing: chasing the cat.



Apostrophe

This marks the possessive or omitted text.

EXAMPLE

The dog's owner couldn't see the cat.



Why we need punctuation

Some people might argue that writing would be simpler without punctuation. However, writers have something to say and want readers to understand exactly what they mean. Punctuation makes this possible.

What punctuation does to writing

yes	This word has no punctuation marks. It is just a sequence of letters that together form a word. The reader can read this word in any way.
Yes.	This is a statement. It has a period (.), which marks the end of the sentence. This tells the reader to read the word calmly, as it states a fact.
Yes?	This is a question. It has a question mark (?) at the end of the sentence. It tells the reader to read the word as a question, with a slightly raised voice.
Yes!	This is an exclamation. It has an exclamation point (!) at the end of the sentence, which tells the reader to read it with emotion.
y-e-s	The letters of the word <i>yes</i> are separated here by hyphens (-). These tell the reader to read the individual letters slowly and carefully.

Hyphen

This joins or separates words or parts of words.

EXAMPLE

The single-minded dog barked at the cat.



Quotation marks

These enclose direct speech or quotations.



EXAMPLE

“Come on, Fido,” his owner called.

Question mark

This marks the end of a direct question.



EXAMPLE

What are you doing?

Exclamation point

This marks the end of an exclamation.



EXAMPLE

Come here, now!

Parentheses

These surround additional information in a sentence.

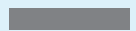


EXAMPLE

The dog (tail between his legs) followed his owner.

Dash

This signals extra information in a sentence.



EXAMPLE

The cat—pleased with itself—leaped out of the tree.