

PUNCTUATION MARKS

I. Introduction

Punctuation marks are a series of marks which can be used to separate words or groups of words to make the intended meaning clear and easy to follow. It can be used to emphasize certain words and phrases, and to distinguish between major and minor ideas. Skillful punctuation is the key to good sentence construction and therefore to clear expression. It is much more important to understand how punctuation works, by studying examples here and elsewhere, than to memorize long lists of all uses of all punctuation marks.

Bad punctuation can have serious consequences, leading to difficulties in understanding and even to complete misunderstandings. Consider this sentence:

Don't pick up heavy weights like groceries or children with straight legs.

That is easily misunderstood. Sensible punctuation makes it somewhat clearer:

Don't pick up heavy weights — like groceries or children — with straight legs.

WHAT ARE THE PUNCTUATION MARKS?

Punctuation marks can be summarized within four groups. Here are the mostly used marks in each group:

a. End Punctuation Marks:

1- Full stop (or period in Am Eng.) (.): at the end of statements except those intended for direct questioning or exclamation. Example:

-There are many types of verbs.

-I asked him how he could help me. (Indirect speech)

2- The question mark (?): at the end of direct question:

-What are you doing? - I allowed him to go?

3- The exclamation mark (or exclamation point in Am Eng.) (!): at the end of exclamation or some use it at the end of imperative sentences:

-How great! –Sit down! – How happy everyone would be if there were no pain!

-what a piece of work is man!

b- Non-End Punctuation Marks

1- The comma (,) whenever slight pause, a pair of commas indicates parts of a sentence. The comma is used in :

a- Numeration of certain things in items. Example:

Baghdad, Hillah, and Basrah are Iraqi cities.

b- Between words or phrases in an opposition. Example:

Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, is a big city.

c- With participial clauses. Example:

Having met him, I told Ali the truth.

d- To mark off words of connection. Example:

This proved; however, to be a mistake.

e- In complex sentences to separate adverbials when being put forward.

Example: although it was a difficult exam, we passed it successfully.

f- In direct speech. Example:

"you can say", he said, "exactly what it is."

2- The semi colon (;) is used to show that a number of short sentences are linked in meaning. Example:

3- The colon (:) is used to indicate a longer pause than the semi colon or comma

There are many types of poetry: the ode, the sonnet, the elegy, and the song.

Speech is silver: silence is gold.

4- The dash (_) is used to show that the sentence is broken off in the middle.

Example: If you just study harder_ but what is the use of my speaking?

5- The hyphen (-) is used to show that something is a compound or a division of two

parts. Example: twenty-four, hard-hearted, brother-in-law, co-operate...etc.

6- The slash/ oblique: is used to separate , words or phrases. Example:

He/she, widow/divorced. Also used in writing website titles in the e-net.

Example: *http://www.goo.....*

c- Enclosing Punctuation Marks

1- The brackets: parenthesis (): is used to separate extra information in a sentence,

around letters, cross-references. Example: English sounds (whether being vowels

or consonants) are produced by air out of the lungs. I have (20) advice for you. It

is a well-defined feature in it (see chapter 6)

2- The inverted commas or quotation marks" ": is used to show that the speech is

a direct one. Example: "I was not serious.", he said.

d- Within Word Punctuation Marks

1- The apostrophe ('): is used to show abbreviation with auxiliaries and (not), possession, unusual plurals. Example: He's, Ali's righteous way, 1960's.

2- The abbreviated dot (.): is used to show the abbreviation of words: Mr., Dr.

And if they are more than one (...), they indicate that some words are deleted.

Example: He did the previous ...but not the same...

Some Useful Mechanics in Writing

a- Italics: this form of writing can be also underlined to show emphasis, titles (of books, plays...etc.), foreign phrases or words and alike:

- *I 'm not going to do it- you are.*
- The newspaper titled as *The times* is well-known one.
- I had to say *ciao*. (good bye)

b- Capital letters: are used at the beginning of: a sentence, proper name and their derived adjectives. Example: Germany, German.

c- Number: are used when they are more than 3 words. Example: 189.

Or used in ordinals. Example: 4th June, 1973- June, 4th, 1973

It is not true to start with numeral figures when writing a paragraph. Example:

123 people were killed.

✓ **One hundred and twenty-three** people were killed.