

PUNCTUATION

Punctuation in your academic assignment writing must be accurate. Without clear or correct punctuation, misunderstandings can occur, confusion can spoil your work, your argument can become 'lost' and marks can be deducted for lack of clarity.

Using the correct punctuation in a sentence enables your audience to understand your ideas more clearly.

Consider these examples and their different meanings:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| (A) Employees are required to work 'twenty-four hour' shifts. | = | (24hr shifts) |
| (B) Employees are required to work twenty 'four-hour' shifts. | = | (20 x 4hr shifts) |
| (C) Employees are required to work twenty four 'one-hour' shifts. | = | (24 x 1hr shifts) |

All the above sentences are punctuated very differently and, as a result, **have very different** meanings. A confusing effect can result in your academic writing if you have no control over your punctuation.

This brief factsheet outlines some of the most common uses for frequently used punctuation marks in academic writing. Whilst it is not an exhaustive summary, it should be sufficient for most uses.

Punctuation mark	How to use it	Examples
<p data-bbox="220 163 391 192">, Comma</p>	<p data-bbox="549 163 1034 253">Commas are most often used to separate ideas in a sentence or phrase. Commas also separate items in a list.</p>	<p data-bbox="1096 163 1422 253">E.g. Matt is studying Law, Economics and Industrial Relations this semester.</p> <p data-bbox="1096 297 1449 387">E.g. When you arrive at UTS, be sure to drop into the HELPS Centre.</p>
<p data-bbox="220 495 432 524">; Semi colon</p>	<p data-bbox="549 499 1066 656">Semi colons are used to separate two complete sentences (often on the same topic) which have been linked together. Semi-colons are often used instead of a full stop in order to lengthen the sentence.</p>	<p data-bbox="1096 499 1465 589">E.g. You must try the food in the UTS student café; it is usually very good.</p>
<p data-bbox="220 797 368 826">: Colon</p>	<p data-bbox="549 801 1066 958">A colon usually indicates that a list, summary or a set of bullet points is about to follow. You can also use a colon before 'explaining' something. It can also indicate that a long quote will follow next.</p>	<p data-bbox="1096 801 1481 958">E.g. UTS students usually want to know about: essay writing, exam preparation courses and academic writing improvement.</p>
<p data-bbox="201 1066 373 1095">... Ellipsis</p>	<p data-bbox="549 1070 1066 1193">An ellipsis consists of three full stops together. You use it to show where you have 'left out' material from a chosen text, perhaps due to irrelevance or to shorten the piece.</p>	<p data-bbox="1096 1070 1473 1294">E.g. 'Accounting standards are updated frequently...it is important for accounting students to be aware of these changes and review them occasionally' (Jenkins 2014, p. 34).</p>
<p data-bbox="220 1485 443 1574">() Parentheses / Brackets</p>	<p data-bbox="549 1440 1054 1597">Parentheses or brackets are often used to include extra or additional information into a sentence. Use these sparingly in your academic work but they can be helpful for clarifying your ideas.</p>	<p data-bbox="1096 1440 1453 1563">E.g. The biology experiment (on photosynthesis) was carried out over a six-week period during semester 2.</p>
	<p data-bbox="549 1709 1027 1832">Parentheses are commonly used to include the original source of information for the bibliographic reference citations within an academic text.</p>	<p data-bbox="1096 1709 1473 1865">E.g. Effective hand hygiene is seen as an imperative element in disease and infection control (Collins & Weatherley 2009; Kelleher 2011; Zhang 2010).</p>

Punctuation mark	How to use it	Examples
<p>” Quotation marks (also referred to as inverted commas)</p>	<p>Quotation marks are used to show the exact words you have used from a text.</p> <p>Single or double quotation marks?</p> <p>Single quotation marks are recommended in keeping with the trend toward minimal punctuation.</p> <p>Single quotation marks (‘) denote text taken from written sources.</p> <p>They can be used to add extra ‘emphasis’ or ‘stress’ to your text. We usually use single inverted commas for this emphasis/stress effect.</p> <p>Double quotation marks (“) are often used to denote a quote within a quote or direct speech.</p>	<p>E.g. Collins (2009, p. 34) states that ‘nursing practices involves systematic problem analysis’.</p> <p><i>Refer to the example above.</i></p> <p>E.g. Please take a copy of the ‘lecture slides’ not the tutorial ones.</p> <p>E.g. The lecturer said, “Hello.”</p>
<p>● Full stop</p>	<p>Full stops indicate that the sentence has come to an end. They are also used to punctuate dates and numbers.</p>	<p>E.g. Please use 12.5 size font in your literature review assignment.</p>
<p>C Capitalisation</p>	<p>Capital letters need to start each new sentence.</p> <p>We also capitalise names of things (proper nouns) such as job titles, proper nouns, organisations and countries.</p>	<p>E.g. Welcome to the University Of Technology, Sydney.</p> <p>E.g. Professor Wu was a leading academic at Hong Kong Polytechnic before arriving in Australia to work in the Faculty of Engineering and IT at the University of Technology, Sydney.</p>
<p>- Hyphen</p> <p>— Dash</p>	<p>As a general rule, hyphens ‘join’ items together. They are most commonly used in prefixes, compound words (nouns, adjectives, verbs) and a small number of suffixes.</p> <p>Dashes separate ideas or items. They indicate an abrupt change, introduce an explanation, expand a statement, or set apart items that would normally be included in parentheses/brackets.</p> <p>A hyphen is the shortest of the horizontal punctuation lines (-); dashes are longer (--).</p>	<p>E.g. Post-industrialisation a two-fold increase</p> <p>E.g. National policies may change the decision-making environment – water licencing reform is an example – or provide guidance on suitable areas for government investment.</p>

Punctuation to generally avoid in academic writing:



Punctuation mark	Why avoid?
Use of question marks '?'	Generally, you want to inform rather than 'question' your reader.
Use of 'etc.'	This can lead to giving vague and unclear information.
Use of exclamation marks '!'	Academic writing is 'non-emotional', so exclamation marks are not necessary.
Contractions such as <i>I'll</i> , <i>you'll</i> , <i>can't</i> , <i>doesn't</i> and <i>aren't</i>	These are features of informal speech. In academic writing, spell the two words in full.
Use of the ampersand (&)	Do not use these in your sentences to abbreviate 'and'; however, in a citation it is permitted e.g. (Smith & Collins 2015).

Still not sure?

One of the best ways to know how to punctuate a sentence if you're not sure, is to read it ALOUD to yourself. Notice where you naturally pause, or add extra emphasis or perhaps extra information. Noticing these aspects will help you to decide where and when to punctuate.

For more advanced punctuation knowledge, come in to see an Advisor in the HELPS Centre or consult some of the many punctuation resources held in the UTS library.

Recommended Reference:

Snooks & Co. 2002, *Style Manual: for authors, editors and printers*, 6th edn, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, Milton, QLD.