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How To Use Punctuation

By Rumki Sen

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The most common mistake people tend to make while writing is in the use of Punctuation. Wrong punctuation can damage the flow of ideas and change meaning, but properly used punctuation not only helps readers understand your meaning but also makes them engrossed in your writing. The following discussion is about some of the frequently misused punctuation marks and what actually their correct application should be.

Use of Apostrophe – Use an apostrophe to show possession, but never put apostrophe in case of possessive pronouns. Always remember that when the word "it's" is used, it is actually for the contraction for the two words: "it has" or "it is". On the other hand, "its" is a possessive pronoun, and the word being already possessive should not contain an apostrophe in it.

Example

It's the same thing happening over and over again.
(Contraction of It and is: It is the same thing happening over and over again).

Wrong: That car is your's.

Right: That car is yours.

Note: Rewriting is sometimes the solution for an awkward possessive.

Awkward: A friend of mine's cap.

Better: A friend's cap (or the cap of a friend of mine).

To show possession in the case of singular nouns, add 's, and for plural words that end in s, add only an apostrophe. Don't forget to put 's with plural words not ending in s.

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Example

Singular: nurse's uniform

Plural: nurses' uniforms (plural word ending in s)

Plural: children's uniforms (plural word not ending in s)

Use of Comma – Use commas to separate three or more items in a list. Though journalists most of the times omit the final comma before the word "and", but retaining the final comma avoids confusion.

Example

Poor: In this website, you can read articles about how to do business online, the woman who daily eats 45 eggs and Tom Cruise.

Better: In this website, you can read articles about how to do business online, the woman who daily eats 45 eggs, and Tom Cruise.

Use a comma to separate two independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions.

Example

Wrong: I am not good in writing but I love writing.

Wrong: I am not good in writing, but, I love writing.

Right: I am not good in writing, but I love writing.

Note: If the clauses are long and already contain commas, separate them with a semicolon rather than a comma.

Wrong: If a man begins with certainties, he shall end in doubts, but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties. – Francis Bacon

Right: If a man begins with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties. – Francis Bacon

Run-on sentences – Where Run-on sentences are concerned (in case you don't know what it is, a run-on occurs when two independent clauses are not separated by punctuation or conjunction), add a period, or a semi colon, or a comma in places of separation.

Example

Wrong: A good student can score full marks in Mathematics it's his analytical ability that will help him

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achieve that.

Right: A good student can score full marks in Mathematics. It's his analytical ability that will help him achieve that.

Use of Quotation Marks – Use quotation marks to indicate direct quotation.

Example

"That guy knows me," Mr. Wong said, "very well."

Note: Never use it for indirect quotation (a restatement of someone's words).

According to Mr. Wong, that guy knows him very well.

Use single quotation marks to indicate a quote within a quote.

Example

Wrong: Richard wrote, "When Berkeley said, "esse est percipii", he meant that the existence of a thing consists in its being perceived."

Right: Richard wrote, "When Berkeley said, 'esse est percipii,' he meant that the existence of a thing consists in its being perceived."

Note: Always put the comma and final period inside the quotation marks, and put other punctuation marks outside unless they are part of the thing being quoted.

There are many other frequently used punctuation errors, but the above–discussed ones are those I have mostly encountered in several writings. Before putting punctuation marks in your sentences, always ask yourself what meaning you want to convey to the readers. Accordingly, put the marks. In case the sentence becomes difficult to punctuate, consider rewriting it, because when a sentence is well written, it almost punctuates itself.

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Where Are The Punctuation Points In Your Life?

By David Bates

We live in a very busy age with many pressures and demands on our time. Often in workplaces there is a culture of busyness, where its important to be seen to be busy and stressed. Isnt that how you show that youre important and care about your work? Outside of work there are often enormous numbers of things competing for our time and attention: family, friends, hobbies. And if we relax in front of the TV we see adverts for things we "should" have, or see things wed like to, or "ought" to be doing. It can feel overwhelming at times which is why many people find themselves rushing, rushing, rushing, busy, busy, busy, with barely time to draw breath.

If you find yourself in that situation, you may want to ask yourself where the punctuation points are in your day. Think about how a book is structured: chapters; sections; paragraphs; sentences; and the sentences themselves divided up with commas, semicolons, etc. Its structured in this way to enable us to make sense of the words. The punctuation points not only provide a structure and context so that we can understand the meaning of what has been written, they also tell us where we can take a breath. To find out the truth of this, why not read this paragraph out loud twice, either to yourself, or somebody else. The first time try and read it as if there was no punctuation, in a monotone voice, continuously until you run out of breath. The second time you read it pace yourself, vary the tone of your voice, and follow the punctuation. See what difference it makes. In fact why not try it now?

That was interesting wasnt it? So in a busy day, what might be your punctuation points? In the workplace you might leave your desk to get a drink. At lunch time you could leave the building, if only for a few minutes, for a complete change of scenery. At home, does the TV have to go on automatically? Could you just sit quietly for a short while and start to notice where there is any physical tension in your body and start to release it?

And when you actively find these punctuation points youre expressing the first of the Five Elements of Personal Development © by taking responsibility for yourself

David Bates is a life coach, published author, public speaker and workshop leader. For further information and for pages of tips, tools and resources for your success, visit:

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