



# Academic Writing Understanding Punctuation

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MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ,  
MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY



OP Vzdělávání  
pro konkurenceschopnost



INVESTICE  
DO ROZVOJE  
VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

## Perfection in Punctuation...

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1. Vinski said the Head is a perfectionist.
  - *Now: change the perfectionist...*
2. 'Vinski,' said the Head, 'is a perfectionist.'
  - Poor punctuation can result in a mismatch between intended and interpreted meaning

## But what do you mean...?

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- The confectionery, which was made with white chocolate, was returned to the factory.

All the confectionery was made with white chocolate and it was all returned.

- The confectionery which was made with white chocolate was returned to the factory.

Only that made from white chocolate was returned to the factory.

## Same text, different meaning...

[Source: <http://2000clicks.com/Graeme/LangStructSpellingPunct.htm>]

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Dear John,

I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be happy forever – will you let me be yours?

Gloria.

## Or, was *this* Gloria's real meaning...?

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Dear John,

I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men, I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be happy forever. Will you let me be?

Yours,

Gloria.

# Punctuation Marks: The Basics

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- Rules gradually change over time, through usage
- Differences exist between punctuation rules in British (BE) and American (AE) English
- Good punctuation is a necessary part of academic writing (including Reference Lists)
- Poor punctuation can result in a total lack of understanding, or partial misunderstandings
  
- Exercises 1 & 2

# Common Punctuation Marks

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- Full stop (or period) [ . ]
- Comma [ , ]
- Exclamation mark [ ! ]
- Question mark [ ? ]
- Inverted commas [ ‘ ’ ]
- Quotation marks [ “ ” ]
- Colon [ : ]
- Slash [ \ / ]
- Semicolon [ ; ]
- Apostrophe [ ’ ]
- Brackets (or parentheses) ( ) [ ]
- Dash [ – ]
- Hyphen [ - ]
- Ellipsis mark [ ... ]
- Capitalisation

# Punctuation Marks: The Rules

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**The full-stop** (AE: period) [ . ] is used...

- At the end of a sentence
  - He expressed excitement about his travels.
  - He expressed excitement (about his travels).
  - He said, “I’m excited about my travels.”
  - He was excited vis-à-vis his travels. Vis-à-vis means ‘in relation to’.
- Following abbreviations
  - e.g. / Dec. / etc. / no. / Mr. \* / (\*AE. In **BE**, this is omitted where the last letter of the contracted word is used, e.g.: Mister = Mr / Doctor = Dr)
  - For initialisms (AE)
  - U.K. / R.S.P.C.A. /M.P. / L.A. (**BE**: UK/RSPCA/MP...)



## Full stop: When not to use one

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- After headings/sub-headings
- Following full references
  - Business Management English (BME)
  - London School of Economics (LSE)
- Inside brackets
- After a question/exclamation mark

## The Comma [ , ] is used...

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- Between items in a list
  - The modules covered on the course are HRM, Accounting & Finance, Organisational Behaviour and Marketing.
- To separate independent/relative clauses
  - The students attended the workshop, after which they expressed confidence about their writing.
  - The Preessional course, which is offered in the summer, is very popular.
- After introductory words/phrases
- Following this, the company introduced an incentive scheme.
- Alternatively, the company may choose to implement a bonus system.

## ...cont'd

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- Before certain coordinating conjunctions: and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet...
  - The suggested strategies had been implemented, but the problems continued.
  - She was almost guaranteed a promotion, for she had consistently met all her targets.
- In referencing/citations
  - According to a recent study (Bailey, 2009) this situation is...
  - This has been highlighted in many studies (Ali, 2000; Baker, 2009; Smith, 1998; Jones, 2003).
  - *In a Reference List, e.g.: when referring to Journals : 3, (5), 8.*

## The Comma: when not to use one

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- To separate a noun and its modifying adjectives when the adjectives come before the noun
  - The bright red, car was a Corvette.
- after the main clause when a dependent (subordinate) clause follows it
  - He was late for the lesson, because his alarm clock did not work.
- to separate the subject from the verb
  - The most important attribute of a team player, is good communication skills.
- Some people use the 'Oxford Comma' before and in a list
  - The modules covered on the course are HRM, Accounting & Finance, Organisational Behaviour, and Marketing.
- Now try Exercise 3....

## The Colon [ : ] is used...

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- To precede a list
  - The essay contains three sections: introduction, main body, conclusion.
- To introduce a quotation
  - Maslow (1943) said this about motivation: ‘People have a set of basic...’
- Between two sentences (where the second explains the first)
  - Several employees were keen to request additional overtime: the recession was causing people significant financial problems.
- In citations, between the year and page no.
  - ‘...these set of assumptions’ (Bailey, 2003:56).

## The Semicolon [ ; ] is used...

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- to join related independent clauses in compound sentences (where there is no conjunction)
  - Kay worked very hard and had consistently met all her targets; she was certain to receive a promotion.
- to separate items in a series if they already include commas
  - The team consists of Dorota Pacek, Director; Gail Horton, Office Manager; and Vicky Spencer, Secretary.
- before introductory words such as namely, however, i.e., for example, (the comma can also be used here)
  - The company is undergoing a number of changes; for example, restructuring and re-deployment of staff.

## The Apostrophe [ ' ] is used...

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- To indicate possession (excl. its, his, hers, yours)
  - Jon's office is on the first floor.
- For possession by two people ('s after second name)
  - Tom and Richard's office is on the first floor.
- Plural possession: make noun plural first, then use '
  - ...the two managers' office / the two women's office / the Lees' office...
- With plural nouns ending in 's' (add only ')
  - ...the Jones' lie in court led to...
- To signal omission of letters/contractions
  - She's in the room on the top floor.

## The Question Mark [ ? ] is used...

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- At the end of a direct question
  - Would you like to join us for lunch?
- For tag questions
  - We can establish the reasons later, can't we?
- Do not use question marks for indirect questions
  - I wonder if she would like to join us for lunch.



## Exclamation Marks [ ! ] are used...

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- to express surprise, anger, joy, and/or in quotes
  - She was elated to learn of his promotion!
  - ‘I’ve been promoted!’ she exclaimed.
  
- in informal and literary texts
  - Guess what?! I’ll be visiting the UK next month!
  - That was the first time I saw her. And how pretty she was!
  
- almost never used in academic writing

## Quotation Marks/Inverted Commas

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- Used interchangeably, though some rules apply:
- [ ‘ ’ ] are often used to refer to titles, technical words, in-text phrases/quotations, & around titles of chapters/articles in Reference Lists:
  - In her book entitled ‘In Other Words’, Baker (1992) refers...
  - The meaning or ‘semantic value’ of the words must not be...
  - Baker (1992:3) states that ‘isomorphic equivalents are rare’...
  - Jordan (2003) ‘Lexis’. In: Bailey, S. (ed.) Academic Writing...
- [ “ ” ] commonly used for short, in-text quotes that are under three lines long; [ ‘ ’ ] may also be used

## Other Punctuation Marks

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- [ ... ] used to replace missing text (ellipsis)
- [ - ] to join two words
- [ – ] used between two clauses/sentences
- ( ) includes additional info/asides/exceptions/references
  - This office (which was on the first floor) was the best in the building.
  - ...as has been shown above (Baker, 1992).
  - The three reasons were as follows: a) ....., b) ..... and c) .....
- [ ] used for additions to quotes; for sic; reference list
  - ‘[T]hese [anxious] students should be informed of the risks of plagiarism.’
  - The cooperation [sic] was at its best in the early 1980s.
  - For a website reference [accessed on 22 November 2009]

# Punctuation Practice

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- How much do you remember and understand...? Try the remaining exercises on the handout to find out!
- Work with a partner before we check the answers together...

## Sources consulted

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Inovace jazykového vzdělávání

**Thank you for your attention.**

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**Slideshow:** Hasan Shikoh 2012  
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