

Punctuation and formatting in academic writing with defining your terms practice

Choose one of the things below and work together to describe its form and uses in as much detail as possible, including contrasting with other things. Some actually mean the same thing.

Apostrophe	Back(ward) slash	Blank line	Bold/ Bold script
Bracket	Bullet point	Capital letter	Colon
Comma	Dash	Dot dot dot	Double quotation marks
Emoji	Emoticon	Exclamation mark	Exclamation point
Forward slash	Full stop	Hyphen	Indent
Italics	Numbering	Parenthesis	Period
Question mark	Quotation mark	Round bracket	Semicolon
Single quotation mark		Space	Speech marks
Square bracket	Triangular bracket	Underlining	

Useful language for comparing		
Contrasting	Giving additional information	Other useful language
In contrast whereas unlike	In addition We should also perhaps add A related use is...	According to... If we take... as an example... Generalising from this example,...

Ask your teacher about any which you aren't sure of, especially any differences.

Match up the pieces of paper your teacher gives you to make explanations of some of the things above.

AND/ OR

Write the names of some of the things above in descriptions that you are given.

Homework

Make similar definitions of the meaning and uses of three other things from the original list above. Next week your partner will read or listen to your definitions and try to guess what you are describing. You will then discuss the accuracy and completeness of those definitions. Please try to write it from your own ideas and then research to check and expand on that.

-----cover, cut or fold-----

Suggested answers

1. capital letter
2. colon
3. comma
4. square bracket
5. semi-colon
6. bracket
7. dash

1.

As well as the obvious uses (starting sentences, days of the week, months, proper nouns, etc),

_____s are used at the beginning of the main words of names of things such as books and articles.

By “main words”, we mean not grammar words like determiners (“a”, “an”, “the”, etc), prepositions (words like “to”, “of” and “for”) or conjunctions (such as “and” and “but”), unless they are the first word in the title.

It is sometimes confusing whether something should be considered the name of something or simply a description.

For example, “Central London” would mean following the official description of that (zones one and two), whereas “central London” would be a more general or personal definition.

2.

The online Macmillan Dictionary gives examples of the use of a _____ as “before an explanation or list” (retrieved 12 May 2013).

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (5th Ed., 1995) also mentions “an example, a [...] summary of what precedes it, or a contrasting idea”,

and to this we can add the more common academic situations of long and complex lists, usually presented with numbers or bullet points and/ or divided by semicolons.

3.

A _____ “signals a break in the flow of the sentence”, including “separat[ing] extra information from the main idea of the sentence, separat[ing] linking words from the main idea of the sentence [and] resolv[ing] ambiguity.” [1]

Examples of linking words and phrases which are usually followed by a _____ include “furthermore”, “however”, “similarly”, “again”, “therefore”, “consequently”, “in conclusion” and “finally”.

_____s are also used to divide up lists, with semicolons being used for lists where each item is more complicated.

4.

To quote wholesale from The Chicago Manual of Style (16th Ed.):

“ _____s (in the United States usually just called brackets) are used in scholarly prose mainly to enclose material – usually added by someone other than the original writer – that does not form a part of the surrounding text.

Specifically, [...] _____s enclose editorial interpolations, explanations, translations of foreign terms, or corrections.”

They can also be used surrounding three dots to show parts of the text which were edited out, as in the quote given above.

To avoid round brackets within round brackets, the inner ones can also be replaced with _____s.

5.

The online Macmillan dictionary defines a _____ as “a punctuation mark [...] that is used to separate words in a list, or two parts of a sentence that can be understood separately” (retrieved from <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/semicolon>, 10 May 2013),

but the first part of that definition could easily refer to a comma. The difference in this case is that _____s are used for more complex lists, often ones introduced with a colon, and perhaps even ones with commas within the items on the list (although this can be confusing and is not usually good style).

The second use given by the Macmillan dictionary is more similar to that of a full stop, but emphasising the connection or similarity between the two clauses more than a full stop would and perhaps replacing a linking word. This use is difficult even for native speakers and so is best avoided.

6.

According to the Macmillan dictionary website, _____s (or parentheses in American English) are “used in writing or mathematics for showing that the piece of information or set of numbers between them can be considered separately.” However, this is also true of paired commas.

We therefore need to be more precise, adding that _____s are generally used for information which is more complex or further from the main topic of the sentence than information between paired commas. This includes examples, references to other parts of the page, and where a quotation was taken from. As with paired commas, the general rule for information in brackets is that you should be able to understand the sentence even with those words removed.

Punctuation in academic writing questions

Try to answer the questions below, then re-read the texts to check.

What kinds of words are not capitalised in titles?

What linking words are usually followed by a comma?

What's the difference between semicolons with lists and commas with lists?

What kind of brackets are most likely with the expression "sic" (used to show that there is a mistake in the quoted text)? Why?

Why might a writer join what could be two sentences with a semicolon instead? What changes to the sentences might be needed to make that possible?

Is joining sentences that way recommended by the text?

Give examples of things which are usually in brackets rather than between paired commas.

In what situations should something be in brackets or paired commas, rather than just forming part of the flow of the sentence with no punctuation?

Try to answer these other questions about punctuation that are not covered in the texts, then discuss as a class.

How can you divide up information in a list introduced with a colon?

What are the differences between single and double quotation marks? How can you know which ones to use?

Are contractions with apostrophes acceptable in academic writing?

Apart from quoting, what can quotation marks be used for in academic writing?

Punctuation in definitions

Put capital letters etc into the definitions below, then compare your answer to the texts. Other answers may also be possible, so check any differences with your teacher.

Capital letters

as well as the obvious uses starting sentences days of the week months proper

nouns etc capital letters are used at the beginning of the main words of names

of things such as books and articles by main words we mean not grammar

words like determiners a an the etc prepositions words like to of and for or

conjunctions such as and and but unless they are the first word in the title it is

sometimes confusing whether something should be considered the name of

something or simply a description for example central london would

follow the official description meaning zone 1 and zone 2 whereas central London

would be a more general or personal definition

Colon

the online macmillan dictionary gives examples of the use of a colon as before

an explanation or list retrieved 12 may 2013 the oxford advanced learners

dictionary 5th ed 1995 also mentions an example a ... summary of what

precedes it or a contrasting idea and to this we can add the more common

academic situations of long and complex lists usually presented with numbers

or bullet points and/ or divided by semicolons

Square brackets

to quote wholesale from the chicago manual of style 16th ed square

brackets in the united states usually just called brackets are used in scholarly

prose mainly to enclose material usually added by someone other than the

original writer that does not form a part of the surrounding text specifically ...

square brackets enclose editorial interpolations explanations translations of

foreign terms or corrections they can also be used surrounding three dots to

show parts of the text which were edited out as in the quote given above

Defining your terms phrases gapfill

Put one word into each of the gaps below, from your memory or own ideas.

Capital letters

As well _____ the obvious uses (starting sentences, days of the week, months, proper nouns, etc), capital letters _____ used at the beginning of the main words of names of things such _____ books and articles. By “main words”, we mean not grammar words like determiners (“a”, “an”, “the”, etc), prepositions (words like “to”, “of” and “for”) or conjunctions (such as “and” and “but”), unless they are the first word in the title.

It is sometimes confusing whether something should be considered the name of something _____ simply a description. For example, “Central London” would follow the official description (meaning Zone 1 and Zone 2), whereas “central London” would be a _____ general or personal definition.

Colon

_____ online Macmillan Dictionary _____ examples of the use of a colon as “before an explanation or list”. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (5th _____, 1995) also mentions “an example, a [...] summary of what precedes it, or a contrasting idea”, and to this we can _____ the more common academic situations of long and complex lists.

Semicolon

The online Macmillan dictionary defines a semicolon _____ “a punctuation mark [...] that is used _____ separate words in a list, or two parts of a sentence that can be understood separately” (retrieved _____ <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/semicolon>, 10 May 2013), but the first part of the definition could easily refer _____ a comma. The difference _____ this case is that semicolons are used for more complex lists.

(Round) brackets

According _____ the Macmillan dictionary website, round brackets (or parenthesis _____ American English) are “used in writing or mathematics for showing that the piece of information or set of numbers between them can be considered separately.” However, this is _____ true of paired commas. We therefore need to _____ more precise, adding _____ round brackets are generally used for information which is more complex or further from the main topic of the sentence. This includes examples, references _____ other parts of the page, and where a quotation was taken _____. As with paired commas, the general rule for information in brackets is that you should be understand the sentence even with those words removed.

Mixed answers

Use the mixed answers to help with the gapfill task above.

also
are
as
as
as
be
Ed.
from
from
gives
in
in
more
or
that
the
to
to
to
with

Check with the original texts. Other answers may be possible, so please check with your teacher before changing the words that you put.

Underline useful phrases for defining your terms in academic writing and presentations above.

Homework

Write similar definitions of other aspects of punctuation and formatting such as those on the first page, and see if your partner can guess which one you are defining in the next lesson. As in the examples here, please use sources such as dictionaries and academic writing style guides to help, but always alter and comment on the definitions, examples etc given there.