Punctuation

APOSTROPHE [‘]

To Indicate Possession

- For words not ending with an s or a z sound, add ‘s. the baby’s rattle/ the children’s tree house/ somebody’s drink
- For words ending in an s or a z sound add an apostrophe: the babies’ rattle/ the Guinness’ sake/ the thesis’ length
- With names of more than one syllable, use either ‘s or (‘), unless additional s makes word difficult to pronounce: Thomas’s (Thomas’) / Aziz’s (Aziz’) / Genesis’ (not Genesis’s)
- Used in expressions denoting time or measure: a four week’s trip / a dime’s worth / a stone’s throw

To Indicate Omission

- Show that letters or numerals have been omitted: it is – it’s / cannot – can’t / you are you’re / 1929 – ’29

Plural of Letters or Numbers

- Add ‘s to pluralize letters or numbers: mind your p’s and q’s / a roomful of VIP’s / during the 1960’s (or 1960s)

BRACKETS [[]]

- Enclose words in a quotation that did not appear in the original: “I respect him (Nixon) for what he did,” he said.

COLON [:]

- Indicate a list, example or that a strong assertion will follow to complete an introductory statement: The monk takes three vows: chastity, poverty, and service.
- After a formal salutation in a letter: Dear Sir or Madam

COMMA [,]

- Prevent the reader from misunderstanding a sentence (Change: If you cook Rick will do the dishes. To: If you cook, Rick will do the dishes.)
- Distinguish the various elements of a series: The torn, tattered, soaking flag was lowered.
- Some sentences begin with introductory words or phrases; these are connected to the main body of the sentence with a comma: Breathing heavily, the man returned from the chase.
- A sentence may contain information that is not essential to its grammatical structure, but does contribute to its exact meaning; this information is set off form the sentence by commas: The mayor, who was very ill, attended the event.

DASH [-] For a more personal and dramatic flavor, dashes can be used to set off extra, information: My wife – this friend, this angel, this love – lay dying before me.
- Use a dash instead of the word to in reference to dates, pages, paragraphs, verses and cantos: 1930-1940/ pages 16-25

ELLIPSIS […]

- Use to indicate the omission if a word or words: “And so… ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” John F Kennedy

EXCLAMATION POINT [!] End of statement of strong emotion, urgency or excitement
- If spoken, it would be gasped, shouted, groaned or cried: Look out! / Oh, my aching head! / Yes, yes, yes, Yes!  
Note: Overuse of exclamation points will lessen their impact

HYPHEN [-] Separate a prefix from a proper noun: French-Canadian
• Show the division of a word at the end of a line: *I don’t understand what you are trying to say.*
• Use in all numbers ranging from twenty-one to ninety-nine, and in fractions: thirty-one/ sixty-six/ one-fifth
• Designate years: the nineteen-sixties/ nineteen sixty-nine
• Use in certain compounds made up of nouns and prepositional phrases: *son in –law*/ *hand- to-hand*/ *man- of-war*
• Use in titles compounded with *ex* and *elect*: ex-wife/President-elect

**PARENTHESIS [()]**

• When information is remotely connected with meaning of the sentence, it is usually enclosed in parentheses:
  Their divorce (*which occurred on my birthday*) was a shock to me.
• Use in legal documents or where double from is used to enclose a figure inserted to confirm a statement given in words: *thirty (30) days/ fifty (50) dollars*

**PERIOD [.]**

• Use at the end of any sentence that makes a statement: *That’s all I can remember.*
• Indicate abbreviations: *c.o.d.* / *dept*
• Use before a decimal: *$30.50/3.145*

**QUESTION MARK [?]**

• Place at the end of any sentence that asks a question:
  *Did Gloria throw that book? / Gloria threw the book?*
• A question mark in parentheses may indicate doubt or irony: *The high point (?) came when the door prizes were awarded.*

**QUOTATION MARKS[“”]**

• There are two classes of quotations-*direct* and *indirect*
• Words spoken in direct discourse require quotation marks; indirect quotations require no quotation marks, and are commonly introduced by *that* (Direct quotation: *The President said, “I am not a crook!”*, Indirect quotation: *The President said that he was not a crook.*)
• A quotation within a quotation is enclosed by single quotation marks: Mike said, “The President said, ‘I am not a crook.’”
• Punctuation belonging to quotation (i.e., period, comma) is set within quotation; punctuation not connected with quotation (i.e., colon, semicolon) is set outside closed quotation marks: *Avril said, “Don’t count on it.”/ Roula said, “I’m not hungry”*; *but her stomach was growling.*
• Set off words that writer does not claim (i.e., words of other persons, slang or jargon that must be “decontaminated” by using quotation marks): *This type of heroin is called “crack.”/ Where is this “just society” of yours?*
• Use around titles of books, plays, poems, and essays; italics or underlining could be used, but not mixed styles: *I have to read Chapter 9, “Lost in Thought.”/ Have you read Das Kapital?*

**SEMICOLON [;]**

• Separate sentence elements of equal weight: *The results were wonderful; it was his method we questioned.*
• Use in lists of names with titles or addresses: *Invitations were sent to Mr. Henry Fisher, M.A.; Ms. Helen Hunter, M.A.; and Dr. Joyce Lacher, Ph.D.*
• Separate groups of words dependent on a general term or statement: *“We hold these truths to be self-evident—that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights...”* *Thomas Jefferson*

**SLASH [/]**

• Indicate alternatives: *Dear Sir/Madam; up/down; mother/father*
• Separate abbreviations: *45 mi/hr, 10 lb/psi*