

Which Punctuation Mark Should I Use? (US English)

Punctuation Mark	Name	Basic Rules	Example
• ;	Semi-colon	1) To merge two independent clauses that may have been separated by the words “and,” “yet,” “but,” “or,” “nor,” “for” and “so.” 2) As a super-comma, to separate items in a long list.	1) There's a crocodile in the toilet; he has a lot of hair growing out of his ears. 2) At the chocolate factory I scoffed acid balls, they were super sour; everlasting gob stoppers, I spat mine out after an hour; curly toffees, rather yummy; and iced fancies, they made me sick.
•	Period (US)	1) To denote that a sentence is finished. 2) After initials, abbreviations and contracted words.	1) Always end your written sentences with a period. 2) Mins. Yrs. Mr. Dr.
• •	Colon	To <i>introduce</i> . Can be used to introduce anything: words, phrases, lists, names or quotations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The hungry buffoon only had one thing on his mind: peanut butter cupcakes. • The hungry buffoon was thinking of lots of things: peanut butter cupcakes, chocolate donuts, crispy duck and pig's trotters. • The buffoon finished his feast in seconds: “I'll never eat again,” he said.
“ ”	Double quotation marks	1) To directly and exactly quote the words of someone. 2) For scare quotes (to denote that the writer doesn't really buy into the meaning.) 3) For words used as examples. NB: To emphasize words do not use double quotation marks, use italics.	1) “I was absolutely amazed to find a crocodile in the bathroom brushing his teeth,” Mother said. 2) The crocodile claimed that his behavior was “normal.” 3) The words “effect” and “affect” are often confused.
“ ”	Single quotation marks	1) To denote a quote within a quote. 2) When providing the names of horticultural cultivars.	1) “I could not believe my ears when the crocodile said, 'Can I have some privacy here?'" Mother exclaimed. 2) An example of an apple is 'Jonathon,' of a grape, 'Chardonnay,' and of the Gallica rose, 'Rosa Munda.'
• • •	Ellipsis	1) To indicate that some information has been omitted. 2) To indicate a pause in a sentence. 3) To indicate an idea is trailing off into silence.	1) As an Olympic athlete, James had tried many sports, swimming, boxing, running . . . skiing and even skydiving. 2) Sarah had a wakeboarding accident . . . the outcome was not attractive! 3) I love you but . . .

!	Exclamation mark	1) To add an air of emotion to a sentence. 2) To accompany mimetically produced sounds.	1) I can't believe it! I think I have fallen in love with a hairy-knuckled oaf! 2) Ha! I knew it; you just can't resist hairy knuckles on a man. Does he comb them?
?	Question mark	Replaces the period in a sentence in order to denote a direct question.	Did you really like my new hairy-knuckled boyfriend?
()	Brackets / parentheses	1) To enclose words that are included as an aside. 2) To enclose words or figures that clarify the existing sentence. NB: It is grammatically acceptable to use commas instead of parentheses but, because the parentheses have the effect of acting as an aside, they are generally used to denote that the information is less important.	1) There were one hundred (100) gremlins banging at the door demanding ice cream. 2) I refused to answer the door because (1) I am not particularly fond of gremlins, (2) I had just got out of the shower, and (3) I had no ice cream in the freezer.
-	Hyphen	To join words and to separate syllables of a single word.	Hairy-knuckled.
—	En dash	The en dash gets its name from its length, as it is one 'N' long. The en dash is used to express a range of values or a distance.	The gremlin was around 50–60 years old, we could tell this from the state of his teeth.
—	Em dash	The em dash also gets its name from its width, which is roughly one 'M' long. It is used in a similar fashion to the parenthesis: to indicate added emphasis, an interruption or an immediate change of thought. Use the em dash sparingly and when you wish to express something in an abrupt manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The crocodile—who knows what he was doing in the bathroom in the first place—used all my shower gel. • It took several people to lift the enormous pumpkin—John, Graham, Tim and Edward.
/	Slash	1) To distinguish between two terms. 2) Within abbreviations. 3) To separate lines of poetry.	1) he/she, period/full-stop, and/or. 2) w/, w/out. 3) I have a spelling checker,/It came with my PC./It plane lee marks four my revue/Miss steaks aye can knot sea.
,	Comma	Please see our Free Comma Cheat Sheet.	
‘	Apostrophe	Please see our Free Apostrophe Cheat Sheet.	

