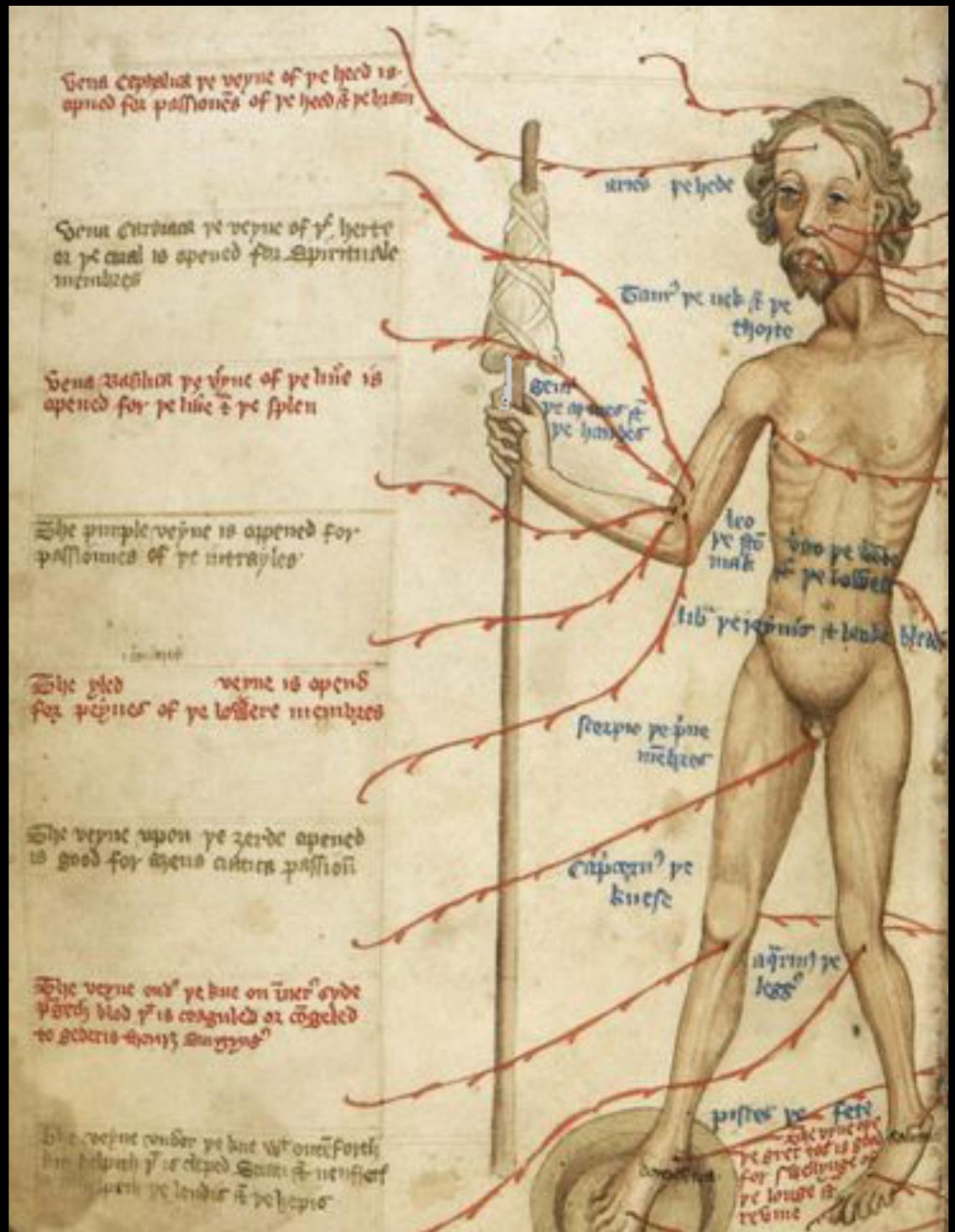




Punctuation for medical students



By A.P.Bridgewood

This short eBook is the result of many years teaching undergraduate and postgraduate medical students and helping researchers prepare scientific manuscripts at the University of Catania, Sicily, Italy. I hope that this eBook will be useful to all those who need a little help with punctuation while writing for scientific journals.

This eBook was written under the auspices of the University of Catania and is complimentary.

I wish to thank The British Library for permission to use the image on the cover:

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A brief, yet comprehensive, guide to English punctuation.

Why should you learn to Punctuate?

For clarity, to say what you mean, to communicate correctly.

“When speaking aloud, you punctuate constantly — with body language.

Your listener hears commas, dashes, question marks, exclamation points, quotation marks as you shout, whisper, pause, wave your arms, roll your eyes, wrinkle your brow.

In writing, punctuation plays the role of body language. It helps readers hear the way you want to be heard.”

Russell Baker

Even if this brief guide to punctuation in English is aimed at medical students, it will be useful for anyone who wants to improve the way they write.

Medical undergraduates and postgraduates, doctors who are specializing and interns all need to be able to understand written medical/scientific English and, especially today, be able to write reports and articles on their patients and research for journals. A good grasp of punctuation is therefore essential to all those working as health professionals.

The use of punctuation has changed over the years and some people will find the explanations given here not always to their liking: always check in the journal or where you want to publish, and try to follow their style.

From a selection of scientific/medical texts from newspapers and published manuscripts (**12,126 words; 66,600 characters; average sentence length 16 words**) the most frequent punctuation marks were:

1 st	,	891	36.2%
2 nd	.	741	30.1%
3 rd	()	289	11.8%
4 th	-	285	11.6%
5 th	;	89	3.6%
6 th	/	46	1.9%

7 th	:	34	1.4%
8 th	“	34	1.4%
9 th	‘	21	0.9%
10 th	[]	19	0.8%
11 th	—	8	0.3%

In this short explanation we will look at the punctuation in the above order. Thus, we will begin with *The Comma*. All the examples, where possible, are taken from *Nature*.



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1: Comma ,

Etymology

From the Greek *komma*, from *kopto* = I cut

The Comma is the shortest pause and is used for:

Separating parts of a sentence: *In light of the dismal record over the past two decades, this represents a kind of progress.*

A list of three or more items:

Expression levels are represented as row-normalized values on a red-green colour scale for wild type (WT), a-amanitin treated (A), Nanog LOF (N), Nanog 1 SoxBI LOF (Ns), and Nanog 1 SoxBI 1 Pou5f1 triple LOF (NSP).

Separating a quotation: *"In terms of cancer," she says, "there aren't many populations where we've identified the necessary cause and have a potential solution on the shelf."*

Indicating clauses: *A clinical trial of 5,840 women, published this year by researchers at the US National Cancer Institute, showed that Cervarix is 93% effective at preventing oral HPV infection in both women with pre-existing cervical infections and those without, none of whom had been previously vaccinated.*

Addressing a person; using a name: *Please, Prof. Johnson, can I give it to you tomorrow? That, ladies and gentlemen, is the end of my introduction.*

Question tags: *She did it, didn't she?*

Sentences with: *of course, however, therefore, finally, yes, nevertheless, in practice; Therefore, Derex et al. turned to the laboratory to investigate the issue.*

Direct Speech: *One participant said, "Making new people feel welcome is great, but singling out one's nationality while doing so seems a bit ham-handed."*

Comparative or contrasting statements: *The bigger they are, the harder they fall.*

Reinforcing statements: *He vomited because he ate too much, that's why! He will be here by 12pm, surely.*

Dates to separate the year: *It happened on June 20, 1986. (20 June 1986)*

Indicating one or more missing words: *I was administered Percodan, John Demerol.*

Separating parts in addresses: *University College London, Medical Research Council Centre for Medical Molecular Virology, Division of Infection and Immunity, University College London, 90 Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, UK.*

Indicating a pause: *Sit down, please*

Large numbers: *Our data are drawn from 34,779 responses to a...*

Restricting clauses: *I ignored all the papers which were written in French. (only those in French, not other languages)*
I ignored all the papers, which were written in French. (All papers were in French)

Modifying word or phrase: *I, Prof. J.Jones, was born in London. Prof. D.Philips, past president of the university, will present the next paper.*

Conjunctions: **nor, either, like, although, but, or, so, and, yet.**
Related sea-slug species are known to inject prostate secretions in a similar manner, but not to the head.

2: The Full Stop •

Etymology

The period comes from the Greek *peri*, meaning *round*. Writers made a small circle at the end of a sentence to show that they had gone “*all round*” a subject; what they had written was complete

The **full stop** (.), also called the **period**, presents few problems. It is chiefly used to mark the end of a sentence expressing a statement:

*I did a degree in biology at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, and I did not like it very much.
The naming of species is, of course, important.
(Warning: some mild spoilers ahead.)*

It is also used for **abbreviations**; however, the tendency is to NOT use them.

The disease has spread to both the UK and the USA. ✓

The disease has spread to both the U.K. and the U.S.A. ✓

The disease has spread to both the U.K. and the USA. ✗

N.B. Be consistent.

It is also used for **contractions**. If the last letter is the same as the last letter of the full word, do not use a full stop.

Both Prof. Smith and Mr Rose were there.

Professor = Prof. (use a full stop)

Mister = Mr (no full stop)

3: Parentheses ()

Etymology

Parenthesis (plural: parentheses) from the Greek παρένθεσις, meaning "alongside of" and "to place"

Parentheses (()), also called **round brackets**, always occur in pairs. They have one major use and a couple of minor uses.

Generally, a pair of parentheses is used for a strong or weak interruption, similar to a pair of dashes or a pair of commas. In the case of a strong interruption, very often it is possible to use either dashes or parentheses:

The current flight from print to electronic media might (although it is too early to say) have an effect on the dissemination of information as profound...

The three major space-flight powers — the United States, Russia and now China — are all represented...

However, parentheses are preferred, rather than dashes or commas, when the interruption is considered as just giving additional information:

...developed RISC (reduced-instruction-set computing) microchips.

*Two species, the cedar waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*; pictured) and yellow warbler (*Setophaga petechia*), avoided the noisy road almost completely.*

Unfortunately, even minimal removal of the target recognition domain led to disruption of DNMT1 enzymatic activity (data not shown), making further refinement of the binding domain unfeasible.

They are used for dates.

Nature Meth. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/nmeth.2731> (2013)

To indicate a possible plural:

...promoter probes that include two (a, b) or one (c) CArG motif(s) were...

Finally, parentheses are used to enclose numerals or letters in an enumeration included in the body of a text:

(1) zygotic transcription of a gene can be masked by a large maternal contribution; and (2) poly(A)¹ selection of mRNAs can lead to apparent increases in gene expression, reflecting delayed polyadenylation of maternal mRNAs rather than transcription.

Try to avoid one set of parentheses inside another.

4: The Hyphen -

Etymology

Hyphen comes from **Ancient Greek** ὑφ' ἑν (hyph' hén), contracted from ὑπὸ ἑν (hypó hén) "in one" (literally "under one").

The **hyphen** (-) has the length of the letter "n" and is used to "join", making compound adjectives, verbs or nouns. There is no space before and after. However, when it is used in place of the DASH there is a space before and after.

Most computers today can hyphenate words; split them to fit on two lines. There are special rules for this and you can also buy hyphenation dictionaries showing where a word can be split and where stress falls. Here, on the right, is an example.

The hyphen also joins words together. **A small-budget job** is a job with a small budget. **A small budget job** could indicate a small job with a budget.

Also names of people in the family can have a hyphen: **mother-in-law, step-son.**

Use hyphens with fractions: **two-tenths, three-quarters.**

Use with exact numerical measurement: **A 10-YEAR-OLD BOY; A 100-METER RACE.**

A period spanning two years: **the winter of 1990-91**

NECTARIFEROUS		
national'-ity	nav-ic'ula	neck'-lace
na'tion-wide	nav-ic'u-lar	neck'-let
na'tive-ness	navi-ga-bil'ity	neck'-line
na'tiv-ism	nav'i-gable	neck'-piece
nativ-is'tic	nav'i-gate	neck'-tie
nativ'-ity	navi-ga'tion	neck'-wear
na'trol-ite	nav'i-gator	necro-bio'sis
nat'-ter-jack	na-wab'	necrog'en-ous
nat'-tily	na'ya-gite	necrog'-ra-pher
nat'u-ral	near'-est	necrol'-ater
natu-ral-is-	near'-ness	necrol'-atry
a'tion	near'-sighted	necro-log'ic
nat'u-ral-ise	neat'-herd	necro-log'i-cal
nat'u-ral-ism	neat'-ness	necrol'-ogist
nat'u-ral-ist	neb'-ris	necrol'-ogy
natu-ral-is'tic	neb'-ula	nec'ro-man-cer
nat'-urally	neb'u-lae	nec'ro-mancy
nat'u-ral-ness	neb'u-lar	necro-man'tic
na'tur-ism	neb'-ule	necroph'-agous
na'tur-ist	neb'u-lise	necroph'-il-ism
natur-is'tic	neb'u-liser	necroph'-il-ous
na'turo-path	neb-u'lium	necro-pho'bia
natur-op'a-thy	nebu-los'ity	necroph'-ori
naught'-ily	neb'u-lous	necroph'-or-ous
naugh'ti-ness	necess-ar'ily	necrop'-olis
nau'-machy	nec'ess-ary	nec'-ropsy
naup'li-form	necessi-ta'rian	necro-scop'ic
naup'-lius	necessi-ta'rian-	necros'-copy
nauro-pom'eter	ism	nec'ro-sin
naus'-eant	necess'i-tate	nec'ro-tise
naus'-eate	necess'i-ties	necrot'-om-ise
naus'-eated	necess'i-tous	necrot'-omy
naus'-eat-ive	necess'i-tously	nec'-tar
naus'-eous	necess'-ity	nec-ta'real
naut'i-cal	neck'-band	nec-ta'rean
naut'i-cally	neck'-cloth	nec'-tared
naut'i-lus	neck'-er-chief	nec-ta'reous
naut'o-phone	neck'-ing	nec-tar-if'er-ous

A period of two or more years: *His stay in Austria (1967-1971) was interesting.*

Use a hyphen for “suspended compounds”:
She suffered both pre- and post-partum.

Other examples:

pre-emptively

a one-year nominal mission

as a president-elect

co-founder

2.5-3.8

fold into stem-loop structures

a stem-loop-like-forming sequence

were re-suspended in 1 ml storage buffer

and 5'-phosphate-dependent-exonuclease

or 3 kb up- or downstream the gene

5: The Semicolon ;

Etymology

The semicolon is first mentioned in the 1640s, a hybrid coined from Latin-derived **semi**- + Greek-based **colon** (n.1). The mark itself was in Greek the point of interrogation.

The **semicolon** (;) has only one major use. It is used to join two **complete** sentences into a single written sentence when all of the following conditions are met:

1. The two sentences are too closely related to be separated by a full stop;
2. There is no connecting word which would require a comma, such as *and* or *but*;
3. The special conditions requiring a colon are absent.

Exhibits A-E: the high degree of autocitation in the Zootaxa paper; the admission that some of the authors were against the ICZN amendments; that they clearly feel that their opinions regarding the amendments have been disregarded; the ad hominem attacks on 'wealthy' publishers as opposed to straitened natural-history societies; and the use of emotive and occasionally intemperate language that one does not associate with the usually dry and legalistic tone of debate on this subject.

The United States and its partners built a space station on their way down from space; China will do so on the way up.

She looked for the virus in early, middle and late stage tumours. HPV was not just present; she found that its DNA had infiltrated the tumours and was producing two potent oncoproteins, an indication it was the cause of the cancer.

The Central Hatchery is not prophetic; it is symbolic.

Received 25 September; accepted 11 October 2013. Published online 30 October 2013.

(On night 8, the final group of radial velocities has only two measurements; we used the mean of those two radial velocities for this test.)

Moreover, transmission is only one aspect of the problem, as cumulative cultural evolution also requires the creation of new knowledge; that is, innovation.

Thus, when considering two improvable tasks, one simple and one complex, artificially introduced into groups of different sizes, we predict that the simple task will be better conserved than the complex task (prediction 1); the probability of conserving the complex task will increase with group size (prediction 2); and better performance will be observed in the larger groups for both tasks (prediction 3).

The semicolon **must** be both preceded by a complete sentence and followed by a complete sentence.

Certain connecting words **do** require a preceding semicolon: *however, therefore, hence, thus, consequently, nevertheless and meanwhile*:

The miR-430 locus is internally repetitive; therefore, reads were aligned to miR-430 in a separate step

In a series where commas are already used: *adult tissue types (brain, GSE11107; liver, GSE11107; heart, GSE17993; skin, GSE24528; kidney, GSE32363; digestive tract, GSE35889; ovary, GSE14979; testis, GSE14979) to classify genes*

6: The Slash /

Etymology

The slash comes from ancient Rome. In the early modern period, in the Fraktur script, which was widespread through Europe in the Middle Ages, one slash (/) represented a comma, while two slashes (//) represented a dash. The two slashes eventually evolved into a sign similar to the equals sign (=), then being further simplified to a single dash (–).

The **slash** (/), also called the **oblique**, the **virgule**, the **stroke**, the **solidus** or the **shilling mark**.

It is used to separate alternatives:

...largely depend on the action of toxin/antitoxin modules.

...and exposed to X-ray film and/or PhosphorImager screens.

Simultaneous removal of Nanog with SoxB1 and/or Pou5f1 results in complete...

...CHX-treated embryos show lower/delayed expression...

The slash may be used to represent a period of time:

The 1994/95 academic year.

The slash is used, especially in scientific writing, to represent the word *per* in units:

...LT-HSCS+WNT5A 100ng/ml with trifluoroacetic acid (0.1% v/v) and...

The slash is used in writing fractions, as in % or 3/4; in this use, it is often called the scratch.

...superantigens and/or antigens and 1/100 decay after 300 iterations)...

7: The Colon :

Etymology

The colon is first mentioned in the 1540s, from Latin *colon* "part of a poem," from Greek *kolon* (with a long initial -o-) "part of a verse," literally "limb, member" (especially the leg, but also of a tree limb).

The **colon** (:) is quite a long pause and can indicate that what follows is, in some way, linked to what was before.

It can go from general to specific. More general: more specific.
Introduction: explanation.

It was touching to see the old space station starring in a film: I know it so well.

HIV integration targeting: a pathway involving Transportin-3 and the nuclear pore...

This study explores the role of a new class of RNAs: DNMTI-interacting RNAs.

As we said in an editorial when the change was announced in September 2012: "It is a sensible move, and one that most in the field should welcome"

(Warning: some mild spoilers ahead.)

Four group sizes were considered: 2 players, 4 players, 8 players and 16 players.

Mere binding of virus is not sufficient for infection of B cells: this requires interactions of the BCR with haemagglutinin, causing both disruption of antibody secretion and FluBI B-cell death within 18 h.

Mice exposed to cold fare considerably better at 05:00 (Zeitgeber time 22) when Rev-erba is barely expressed than at 17:00... .

The colon may be used in writing ratios:

... for 30 min on ice, washed and mixed at a 1:1 ratio with mock-infected MHCII-GFP... .

When you use a colon to introduce a list, make sure to write a complete thought first.

Vaccines and treatments are already available or fast being developed for three of the four pathogens identified: rotavirus, Shigella bacteria and enterotoxigenic Escherichia coli.

Although they might seem incompatible with lasers, disordered materials are common in our daily lives: milk, toothpaste, paper and clouds are just a few examples.

In other words, rather than write something like *Next year we must increase our marketing in: the West, the Pacific Northwest, and the Southern regions*, it is much better to use no punctuation at all. Your lead-in should be a complete thought, as in *Next year, we must increase our marketing in three regions: the West, the Pacific Northwest, and the South*. The complete sentence does a much better job of helping the reader anticipate how the expression will end: Today we will discuss two topics: executive compensation and shareholder rights.

She visited four countries: Portugal, Spain, France, and Italy.

Use a colon to express direct ratio.

Even when the input proportion of basal cells to secretory cells plated in Matrigel was 100:1... .

Because 227/600,000 and 227/3,000,000 are equivalent to 1:2,600 and 1:13,000, respectively... .

8: Quotation Marks " "

Etymology

Some say that *Quotation marks* began in ancient texts as lips, but turned on their sides. Quotation marks were first cut in metal type during the middle of the sixteenth century, and were used by printers by the seventeenth.

Quotation Marks and Direct Quotations

The use of **quotation marks**, also called **inverted commas**, is very slightly complicated by the fact that there are two types: **single quotes** (') and **double quotes** ("). Generally, British usage prefers single quotes for ordinary use, but double quotes are also very common; American usage insists upon double quotes. Usage in the rest of the world varies. The use of double quotes in fact offers several advantages, and this is the usage recommend here.

The main use of quotation marks is to encloses a **direct quotation** — that is, someone's exact words. Here are some examples:

Oceans are acidifying at an "unprecedented rate", with potentially dire... .

"We don't retire," says Bolivar.

It has spent much of the decade since then "skating on thin financial ice", in the words... .

He adds that "some people are saying, 'Look, we don't want any fences in the landscape. We want to keep wildlife moving wherever it wants to.'"

"If it looks like something is going to hit, I call up everyone I know and ask, 'Can you give me a little bit of money?'" he says.

In the News Feature 'BRAIN storm' (Nature 503, 26-28; 2013),... .

... his chest is emblazoned with a 'G' inside a hexagon... .

If you have to interrupt a quotation to clarify something, enclose your remarks in **square brackets** (never parentheses):

... as Huxley put it, "not the advancement of science as such [but] the advancement of science as it affects human individuals".

Use the Latin word *sic*, which means 'thus', enclosed in square brackets and italicized, immediately after a mistake. The mistake can be of any kind: a spelling mistake, a grammatical error, the use of the wrong word, or even a statement which is obviously wrong or silly. Here are some examples, all of which are meant to be direct quotations:

In an Editorial this week entitled "Men [sic]" (Nature 448, 728; 2007)... .

Now, what about other punctuation marks inside or outside the quotation marks.

Use quotation marks to indicate that someone else (not you) either said or wrote the exact words.

Aldous here, as elsewhere, sided with Russell, who had warned, "I am compelled to fear that science will be used to promote the power of dominant groups, rather than to make men happy."

Use quotation marks to indicate that a particular word or phrase is intended ironically.

...but for now the prime minister is more concerned with ridding the country of a "toxic tax".

...that species descriptions must be always "available".

Use quotation marks to introduce an unfamiliar or technical term.

The robot's "end effectors" (i.e., hands) are almost as nimble as a human's.

When the rate of growth slows, economists call the phenomenon "negative growth."

Use quotation marks to indicate that a word or phrase is to be seen as a term, rather than as an ordinary part of speech.

The phrase that comprises should be that includes makes no sense at all unless I show you how to understand the intent: The phrase "that comprises" should be "that includes."

"You" means the loan applicant, and "it" refers to the lender.

Use quotation marks to set off a discrete section of a larger document.

Chapter 3, "The Double Helix," is the most important chapter of her book, Theory of Genetics.

Use "single" quotation marks only when you must quote something within a quotation. (The apostrophe serves this purpose.)

He adds that "some people are saying, 'Look, we don't want any fences in the landscape. We want to keep wildlife moving wherever it wants to.'"

QUOTATION MARKS WITH OTHER PUNCTUATION

The period always goes inside quotation marks.

"You didn't ask the correct questions."

Web addresses

Internet addresses need to be precise; put the period outside the quotation marks.

"www.naturejobs.com".

The comma always goes inside quotation marks.

"I am absolutely convinced that some women will become HIV positive because of the circumcision of their partners," says Auvert.

. "The whole point is, 'if I have the procedure I don't need to'."

Talking About Words

Here's an example:

The word 'NEPHRITIS' (1570s), from Late Latin *nephritis*, from Greek *nephritis* 'disease of the kidneys' from *nephros* 'kidney' + *-itis* 'inflammation'.

This example shows the normal way of mentioning foreign words: the foreign word is put into italics, and an English translation, if provided, follows in single quotes, with **no other punctuation**.

N.B. neither a comma nor anything else separates the foreign word from the translation.

You can also do this with English words:

The words *farther* 'more distant' and *further* 'more, not of distance' should be carefully distinguished.

9: The Apostrophe '

Etymology

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), 'apostrophe' comes ultimately from Greek ἡ ἀπόστροφος [προσφδία] (hē apóstrophos [prosōidía], "[the accent of] 'turning away', or elision"), through Latin and French.

The **apostrophe** (') sometimes causes problems. Do not use it for a plural: *pizza's*, *video's*.

The apostrophe is used in writing **contractions** - one or more letters have been removed.

it's	it is <i>or</i> it has + got
we'll	we will <i>or</i> we shall
they've	they have
can't	cannot
he'd	he would <i>or</i> he had
aren't	are not
she'd've	she would have (not formal)
won't	will not

What's more, grapheme... .

...they can't free electrons from the parent atoms.

There's not really another... .

...that it's often... .

A few words which were contractions long ago are still conventionally written with apostrophes, even though the longer forms have more or less dropped out of use. There are so few of these that you can easily learn them all. Here are the commonest ones, with their original longer forms:

o'clock	of the clock
Hallowe'en	Halloweven

Contractions must be carefully distinguished from **clipped forms**. A clipped form is a full word which happens to be derived by chopping a piece off a longer word, usually one with the same meaning. Clipped

forms are very common in English; here are a few, with their related longer forms:

gym	gymnasium
ad	advertisement
pro	professional
deli	delicatessen
hippo	hippopotamus
bra	brassiere
flu	influenza
phone	telephone
quake	Earthquake

Such clipped forms are **not** regarded as contractions, and they should not be written with apostrophes.

Important note: Contractions must also be carefully distinguished from *abbreviations*. Abbreviations are things like *Mr* for *Mister*, *lb.* for *pound(s)*, *BC* for *before Christ* and *e.g.* for *for example*.

In the UK we do not use an apostrophe in pluralizing dates:

This research was carried out in the 1970s.

In the USA there is an apostrophe:

This research was carried out in the 1970's.

This should be used only when writing for the USA.

Plurals of numbers:

You do not need two 1s.

You do not need two 1's.

You do not need two ones.

Use whichever looks best.

An apostrophe is used for plural letters or any other form that would look strange:

How many s's are there in Hypotheses?

Do not use too many i.e.'s in your writing.

Possessives

An apostrophe is used in a possessive form, like:

...the majority of Rocco's patients... .

...the cancer's clinical characteristics... .

*...the World Health Organization's International Agency for
Research on Cancer in Lyons... .*

The virus's DNA integrates... .

The apostrophe plus s construction is used to form plurals in three special circumstances. First, use it on those rare occasions when you need to pluralize a single letter or digit:

She has trouble pronouncing f's and v's. The data stream consists of 1's and 0's.

Second, use it when you are pluralizing an abbreviation that ends with a period:

He has Ph.D.'s in linguistics and psychology.

Nine people with M.BA's have applied for the position.

Finally, use it whenever it's absolutely necessary for clarity:

Have you considered the pro's and cons?

The diplomat explained the do's and don'ts of the culture.

10: Square Brackets []

Etymology

The chevron was the earliest type of bracket to appear in written English. Desiderius Erasmus coined the term *lunula* to refer to the rounded parentheses (), recalling the shape of the crescent moon.

One common use for **square brackets ([])**, **they** are used to set off an interruption within a direct quotation; refer to that chapter for details.

The doctor said, "I gave him a pill [aspirin]."

"the students must answer both orally and writtenly [sic]."

In scientific writing square brackets are used for citing references: The adhesion assay was carried out using the method of Di Martino et al. [19] slightly modified.

And finally, writers use parentheses; editors use brackets

...as Huxley put it, "not the advancement of science as such [but] the advancement of science as it affects human individuals'.

"A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which [leaders] control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude," Huxley wrote.

Studying mechanical engineering at the California Institute of Technology [Caltech] in the early 1940s... .

11: The Dash —

Etymology

Probably Scandinavian, like the Danish, "to beat"

Here we must speak about the **DASH** and the **HYPHEN** - the **DASH** really has two forms: the **EM DASH** (—) and the **EN DASH** (-).

The **EM DASH** has the length of the letter "M" and is used to "separate". It gives the sense of being longer than a comma but shorter than parentheses. These can be used in pairs. On their own, they can indicate the start of an aside.

The **EN DASH** has the length of the letter "N" and is used for a range of numbers, times, or dates. It indicates "to" or "through"

From Nature

Example	Name	Keyboard
long-lasting	Hyphen	Minus key
25–26	En dash	Alt+0150
actors — terrorists	Em dash	Alt+0151

EM DASH

Driven by Barré-Sinoussi, a strategy to accelerate cure research was launched in 2012 by the International Aids Society – the leading association of HIV/Aids researchers, of which she is currently president.

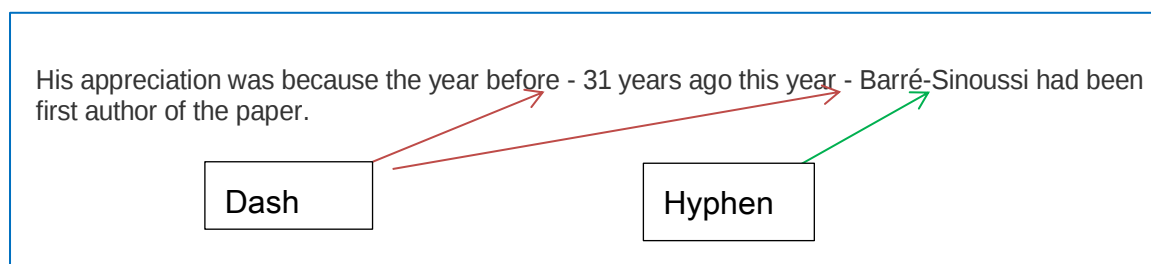
...with — currently unavailable — technologies... .

His appreciation was because the year before – 31 years ago this year – Barré-Sinoussi had been first author of the paper.

They can be used to add emphasis:

...publication might render nomenclatural acts 'unavailable' — that is, of no taxonomic validity.

The dash is generally not present on a computer keyboard, standard practice is to use the hyphen with spaces each side:



THE DASH EMPHASIZES THINGS.

Because it is widest punctuation mark, the dash visually isolates a word or phrase. Thus it signals that something worth noting is about to be said. In technical writing, dashes are used to surround non-essential material, to indicate how ideas relate, and to set up a summary statement.

Use dashes around anything that strongly interrupts the flow of thought.

If you have the public money — as China clearly does — there is no more obvious priority.

A dash can be used (instead of a colon) to introduce a summary statement.

...under the FDA's Breakthrough Therapy Designation programme — a pipeline launched last year to fast-track regulatory approval of particularly promising treatments.

A dash can be used (instead of a comma) before a coordinating conjunction between two sentences.

...inside a hexagon — and his forefinger points straight at the viewer.

Europe could keep more member states happy — but might dilute the project's impact.

Pause:

On the surface, their argument concerns technicalities under which certain forms of publication might render nomenclatural acts 'unavailable' — that is, of no taxonomic validity.

Explanation:

The three major space-flight powers — the United States, Russia and now China — are all represented on screen, and their differing roles in the plot.

If you have the public money — as China clearly does — there is no more obvious priority.

...and raised concerns that a key challenge to lion conservation — lack of funds — is being ignored while scientists trade jabs... .

Just one micrometre-sized flake made in this way can cost more than \$1,000 — making it, gram for gram, one of the most expensive materials on Earth.

Human papillomavirus is causing a new form of head and neck cancer— leaving researchers scrambling to understand risk factors, tests and treatments.

EN DASH

(see *Nature* **466**, 1144–1145; 2010).

800–1,500 metres,
aged 60–85
(1982–2009)
48–72 h
(c; n5 5–10 per group).

Connection or conflict
direct nerve–bacteria interactions
(RT–PCR)
Panton–Valentine leukocidin

Compound adjectives

A prize-winning scientist (hyphen; simple adjective)
A Nobel Prize-winning scientist (en dash; compound adjective)

12: The Question Mark ?

Etymology

The **question mark** began in ancient Roman texts as the Latin word **quaestio**, which means "**question**." Writers used this Latin word when they asked a question in their texts. As time passed, **quaestio** was shortened to **Qo**, then to **Q**, and finally as a **Q** with the period beneath the letter. However, the Roman letter **Q** resembles the Arabic numeral **2**, so that is how the question mark became the symbol it is today.

A question mark (?) is placed at the end of a sentence which is a direct question. Here are some examples:

TOO MANY COOKS?

Perhaps we could teach science to politicians?

Plus, if HPV can get into the mucous membranes of the mouth and throat, where does it stop?

Was it an isolated case?

Had HPV contaminated the sample?

Or, as Shah suspected, could HPV cause some cases of head and neck cancer?

13: Exclamation Mark !

Etymology

The **exclamation mark** has its roots in ancient Greece. **Io** was an ancient Greek word expressing excitement, much like our word “**wow**”. Greek writers added the word **Io** into their texts at places where they were excited. Over time, scholars changed the **o** to a **dot** and finally, the **dot** came to rest under the **I**, resulting in our modern exclamation point.

The **exclamation mark** (!), is used at the end of a sentence or a short phrase which expresses very strong feeling. Here are some examples:

"She lied: "You could be an astronaut!"

During group discussion, we often heard our colleagues exclaim in disbelief: "This cannot possibly be true!"

"The most powerful new amphetamine on the market!"

"She's dead!" he shouted.

"I want you for the Graphene Flagship!"

During group discussion, we often heard our colleagues exclaim in disbelief: "This cannot possibly be true!"

Exclamation marks should be used as little as possible in formal writing! A sentence-final punctuation mark is always written next to the last word of the sentence.

14: Fragments

A **fragment** is a phrase or a word that is understandable but is not a complete sentence. Fragments are very common in ordinary speech. They should be used very sparingly in formal writing; when used, they should be followed by a full stop, a question mark or an exclamation mark, as appropriate:

...with serious repercussions including possible (likely!) expulsion.

...our colleagues exclaim in disbelief: "This cannot possibly be true!"

15: Word Order syntax

Etymology

c. 1600, from French syntaxe (16c.) and directly from Late Latin syntaxis, from Greek syntaxis "a putting together or in order, arrangement, a grammatical construction," from stem of syntassein "put in order," from syn- "together" (see [syn-](#)) + tassein "arrange"

Here is a good point to look at word order, adjectives and nouns. In English, generally, the adjectives come before the noun. When we have a series of nouns, the “real” noun is always the last.

A boy band

A band boy

In the first example we have “a band” and “boy” is now an adjective describing what type of band it is, here the band is made up of only boys. Again, generally, adjectives are never plural (sports is one exception). If we need to indicate only one (or some) then we can say: A three-boy band.

Also the position of adjectives can be important.

16: Colon-Semicolon Compared

Consider the following two sentences:

The patient's condition has worsened. The surgeon wants to operate.

The use of two sentences suggests that there is no particular connection between these two facts: they just happen to be true at the same time. No particular inference can be drawn, except perhaps that things are generally bad. Now see what happens when a semicolon is used:

The patient's condition has worsened; the surgeon wants to operate.

The semicolon now suggests that the two statements are related in some way. The likeliest inference is that the patient's condition is so bad that the surgeon thinks an operation is needed. (Remember, a semicolon connects two sentences which are related.) Now try it with a colon:

The patient's condition has worsened: the surgeon wants to operate.

This time the colon shows explicitly that the surgeon's desire to operate is **because** of the patient's condition. (Remember, a colon introduces an explanation or elaboration of what has come before.)

17: Word order of adjectives

Here are some general rules about the position of adjectives before the noun. The order below should be helpful.

N.B. **And** is seldom used except when the adjectives are a complement, following **be**: *Her hair was long and black.*

The more or most precise adjective is placed nearest the noun, but this is not always easy to decide (try not to use more than three or four together).

***All the first three** competitors broke the record.* (1,2,3,4)

***The beautiful intelligent** girl fell in love with **the tall young** man.* (2,5,6 and 2,7,8) ***There was a round green** spot on **the carved wooden Japanese** screen.* (9,10 and 2,11,12,13)

- 1) **both, all or half**
- 2) **the**
- 3) Ordinal number (**first, last**)
- 4) Cardinal number (**one, three**)
- 5) General judgement (**good, bad, nice, beautiful**)
- 6) General judgement (**mental - intelligent, stupid**)
- 7) Measurement (**big, tall**)
- 8) Age or temperature (**old, young, hot**)
- 9) Shape (**round, square**)
- 10) Colour (**red, green**)
- 11) Verb participle form (**carved, boiling**)
- 12) Material (**wooden**)
- 13) Origin, nationality (**French, Mediterranean**)
- 14) Noun in apposition (**steel, cigarette**)

18: Capital Letters

Capital letters are not really an aspect of punctuation, but we can look at them here. Always use a capital letter for:

- (a) The first word of a sentence, or of a fragment;
- (b) The names of the days of the week, and of the months of the year;
- (c) The names of languages;

(d) Words that express a connection with a particular place must be capitalized when they have their literal meanings. So, for example, *French* must be capitalized when it means 'having to do with France': The result of the French election is still in doubt. The American and Russian negotiators are close to agreement.

However, it is not necessary to capitalize these words when they occur as parts of fixed phrases and don't express any direct connection with the relevant places:

Please buy some danish pastries.

In warm weather, we keep our french windows open. I prefer russian dressing on my salad.

(e) Words that identify nationalities or ethnic groups;
The Basques and the Catalans spent decades struggling for autonomy. The Serbs and the Croats have become bitter enemies. Norway's most popular singer is a Sami from Lapland.

- (g) Proper name;

(h) The names of distinctive historical periods are capitalized:
London was a prosperous city during the Middle Ages. Britain was the first country to profit from the Industrial Revolution.

(i) The names of festivals and holy days; We have long breaks at Christmas and Easter.

(j) Many religious terms are capitalized, including the names of religions and of their followers, the names or titles of divine beings, the titles of certain important figures, the names of important events and the names of sacred books:

An atheist is a person who does not believe in God. The principal religions of Japan are Shinto and Buddhism.

(k) In the title or name of a book, a play, a poem, a film, a magazine, a newspaper or a piece of music, a capital letter is used for the first word and for every significant word (that is, a little word like *the*, *of*, *and* or *in* is not capitalized unless it is the first word):

I was terrified by *The Silence of the Lambs*. Bach's most famous organ piece is the *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*.

(l) The first word of a direct quotation, repeating someone else's exact words, is always capitalized if the quotation is a complete sentence:
Thomas Edison famously observed, 'Genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration.'

But there is no capital letter if the quotation is not a complete sentence:
The Minister described the latest unemployment figures as 'disappointing'.

(m) The brand names of manufacturers and their products are capitalized:

Maxine has bought a second-hand Ford Escort. Almost everybody owns a Sony Walkman.

(n) Roman numerals are usually capitalized:
It is no easy task to multiply LIX by XXIV using roman numerals.

(o) The pronoun I is always capitalized:
She thought I'd borrowed her keys, but I hadn't.

19: What about bullets?

Etymology

1550s, from Middle French boulette "cannonball, small ball," diminutive of boule "a ball" (13c.), from Latin bulla "round thing, knob"

Bullets [•] are useful if each item is not just one word, but a phrase or a statement. If all the items in your list are equally important and you simply need to list them, bullets are probably the best though some writers prefer **asterisks** [*] or other marks. You don't need a punctuation mark at the end of each item, but you should use one after the last item since it ends the sentence.

The committee needs to discuss:

- *trees along the boundary fence*
- *restoration of the old formal garden*
- *a possible fish pond*
- *replacement of old fruit trees*
- *general maintenance*
- *a possible date for starting*
- *recruitment of volunteers.*

20: ABBREVIATING WORDS

When writing formally, it is better not to abbreviate. Write the words out in full. An **abbreviation** is when letters are missed out. Sometimes two words are combined into one. An apostrophe is placed where the letter or letters have been omitted:

'Cannot' becomes 'can't'
'Do not' becomes 'don't'
'Would not' becomes 'wouldn't'
'Could have' becomes 'could've'
'Might have' becomes 'might've'
'Would have' becomes 'would've'

Shortening words

When words are shortened, it is usual to put a full stop at the end:

abbreviation abbr.

etcetera etc.

adjective adj.

information info.

document doc.

language lang.

Some words are abbreviated by using the first and last letters only.

These are **contractions** of the original word and do not usually need a full stop at the end:

Doctor Dr

Road Rd

Mister Mr

Saint St

Mistress Mrs

Street St

USING INITIAL LETTERS

It is becoming increasingly common to describe companies or organisations only by the initial letters of the name of the group. It is no longer considered necessary to put a full stop after each capital letter.

Here are some examples:

AGM Annual General Meeting

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

CPS Crown Prosecution Service

GCSE General Certificate of Secondary Education

MP Member of Parliament

MEP Member of the European Parliament

RAF Royal Air Force

LOOKING AT ACRONYMS

Acronyms are words that are formed by the initial letters and we usually say the word rather than the letters:

AIDS	<i>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</i>
LASER	<i>Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation</i>
NASA	<i>National Aeronautic and Space Administration</i>
NATO	<i>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</i>
RADAR	<i>Radio Detection And Ranging</i>
SCUBA	<i>Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus</i>
SONAR	<i>Sound Navigation And Ranging</i>
UNESCO	<i>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</i>
UNICEF	<i>United Nations Children's Fund</i>
UFO	<i>Unidentified Flying Object</i>
VAT	<i>Value Added Tax</i>

In scientific writing, the names of units are always abbreviated and always written without full stops or a plural **5**. If you are doing scientific writing, then, you should conform by writing **5 kg** (**not** *5 kilogrammes*, and certainly not ** 5 kg.* or ** 5 kgs.*), **800 Hz** (**not** *800 Hertz*) and **17.3 cm³** (**not** *17.3 cubic centimetres*).

There are a number of Latin abbreviations which are sometimes used in English texts. Here are the commonest ones with their English equivalents:

- e.g. for example
- i.e. in other words
- viz. namely
- sc. which means
- c. approximately
- cf.** compare
- V.** consult
- etc. and so forth
- et* and other
- al.* people

Note:

It is becoming more common to see **NB**, **ie**, **eg** as people do not remember the original Latin meanings.

21: Italics

Etymology

1610s (adj.), 1670s (n.) "italic type," from Latin *italicus* "Italian"; so called because it was introduced in 1501 by Aldus Manutius, printer of Venice (who also gave his name to Aldine), and first used in an edition of Virgil dedicated to Italy. Earlier (1570s) the word was used for the plain, sloping style of handwriting, as opposed to Gothic.

Italics have several uses.

Most commonly, italics are used for emphasis or contrast - that is, to draw attention to some particular part of a text. Here are some examples:

Another use of italics is to cite titles of complete works: books, films, journals, musical compositions, and so on:

We saw a performance of the *Messiah* on Saturday. Chomsky's book *Syntactic Structures* revolutionized linguistics. Spielberg won his Oscars for *Schindler's List*.

An exception: the names of holy books are usually *not* written in italics. Thus, we write about the (Holy) Bible and the (Holy) Koran, with no italics. Don't ask why.

Note, we do not use italics when citing a name which is only a conventional description:

Dvorak's ninth symphony is commonly known as the *New World* symphony.

Here the label 'Dvorak's ninth symphony' is not strictly a title, and hence is not italicized.

A third use of italics is to cite foreign words when talking about them. Examples:

The French word *pathétique* is usually best translated as 'moving', not as 'pathetic'. The German word *Gemütlichkeit* is not easy to translate into English.

The Sicilian tradition of *omerta* has long protected the Mafia.

At Basque festivals, a favourite entertainment is the *sokamuturra*, in which people run in front of a bull which is restricted by ropes controlled by handlers.

Related to this is the use of italics when using foreign words and phrases which are not regarded as completely assimilated into English: Psychologists are interested in the phenomenon of *deja vu*.

This analysis is not in accord with the *Sprachgefühl* of native speakers.

If you are not sure which foreign words and phrases are usually written in italics, consult a good dictionary.

It is also quite common to use italics when citing English words that are being talked about, as an alternative to single quotes:

The origin of the word *boy* is unknown.

Note the spelling difference between *premier* (an adjective meaning 'first' or 'most important') and *premiere* (a noun meaning 'first performance').

Finally, italics are used in certain disciplines for various specific purposes. Here are two of the commoner ones. In biology, genus and species names of living creatures are italicized:

The earliest known member of the genus *Homo* is *H. habilis*.

The cedar waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) is a familiar American bird.

Note that a genus name always has a capital letter, while a species name never does.

Special note: If you have a sentence containing a phrase which would normally go into italics, and if for some reason the entire sentence needs to be italicized, then the phrase that would normally be in italics goes into ordinary roman type instead.

USE EXAMPLE

22: Boldface

Etymology

in typography, 1845, from [bold](#) (adj.) + [face](#) (n.). In reference to types, bold (adj.) is attested from 1790, perhaps from the secondary sense "easily visible, striking to the eye."

Boldface letters are the extra-black ones - **like these**. They have only a few general uses.

First, they are used for chapter titles and section headings.

Second, they are used for the captions to illustrations, tables and graphs.

Third, they are sometimes used to provide very strong emphasis, as an alternative to italics.

Finally, boldface is often used to introduce important new terms.

The judicious use of boldface can provide variety and make a page more attractive to the eye, but it is never essential. If you do use boldface, don't overdo it.

23: SMALL CAPITALS

They are used for acronyms, but they can also be used for page headers, in captions and legends, or for abbreviations, acronyms and definitions in body text.

Certain abbreviations are commonly written in small capitals. In particular, the abbreviations BC and AD.

American usage prefers to write the time of day with small capitals:

The earthquake struck at 6:40 AM.

In British usage, this would appear as follows:

The earthquake struck at 6.40 a.m.

Many word processors can produce small capitals; if you can't produce them, use full capitals instead:

Alexander the Great died in 323 BC.

Very occasionally, small capitals are used for emphasis, but it is usually preferable to use *italics* for this, or even **boldface**.

24: Ellipsis Marks ...

Etymology

1560s, "an ellipse," from Latin *ellipsis*, from Greek *elleipsis* "a falling short, defect, ellipse," from *elleipein* "to fall short, leave out," from *en-* "in" + *leipein* "to leave". Grammatical sense first recorded 1610s.

If you want to quote parts of a passage while leaving out some bits, you can do this by inserting an **ellipsis** (...) (also called a **suspension** or **omission marks**) to indicate a missing section of a quotation. If, as a result, you need to provide one or two extra words to link up the pieces of the quotation, you put those extra words inside square brackets to show that they are not part of the quotation. If you need to change a small letter to a capital, you put that capital inside square brackets. Here are some examples:

although the BCA stated "To stifle scientific debate would clearly be wrong...

. "We were told there was a sixty-something per cent of being ... I don't know if it's from HIV

Grow Your Own ... Life After Nature

She isn't anywhere on this Earth, anywhere under the Sun, anywhere except ..."

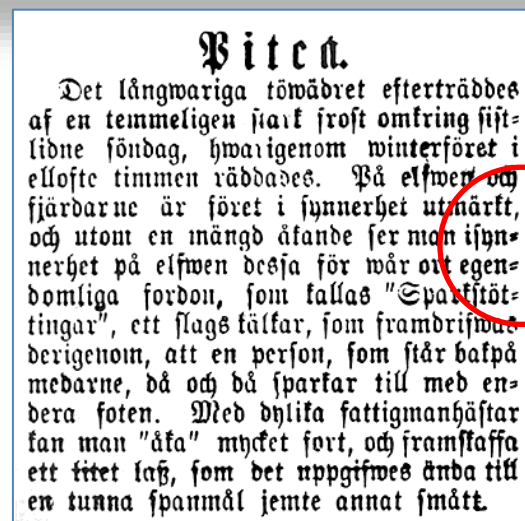
one that most in the field should welcome ... [and then] Proper taxonomy

When you use an ellipsis, be careful not to change the meaning of the original passage.

25: The Slash

Etymology

The slash goes back to the days of ancient Rome. In the early modern period, one slash (/) represented a comma, while two slashes (//) represented a dash. The two slashes eventually evolved into a sign similar to the equals sign (=), then being further simplified to a single dash (–).



The **slash** (/), also called the **oblique**, the **virgule**, the **stroke**, the **solidus** or the **shilling mark**, has several uses, all of them rather minor.

First, it is used to separate alternatives:

with SoxB1 and/or Pou5f1 results in complete block

but honest compliments on clothing style/appearance

Another reader said it "depends entirely on how other incoming researchers/faculty/students are treated".

Second, the slash may be used to represent a period of time:

The 1994/95 season was marred by frequent scandals.

This office is open Monday/Friday each week.

Third, the slash is used, especially in scientific writing, to represent the word *per* in units:

apparent second-order rate constant (k_{cat}/K_m)

Fourth, the slash is used in writing fractions, as in:

catches just 10% of the estimated global malaria

with a 1/10 dilution of drug

It is used in Internet addresses:

<http://www.physics.ucla.edu/research>

Numerals, Fractions and Dates

The compound numerals from twenty-one to ninety-nine are written with hyphens:

France is divided into ninety-six departments. Mozart was only thirty-five years old when he died.

No additional hyphens are used in writing larger numbers:

A leap year has three hundred and sixty-six days. The maximum possible score with three darts is one hundred and eighty.

In formal writing, the numerals from one to twenty are almost always written out:

The American flag has thirteen stripes. We have four candidates for president.

Do **not** write:

- The American flag has 13 stripes.
- We have 4 candidates for president.

Larger numbers, however, may be written with digits, if you prefer:

The bomb killed 37 people and injured over 200 others. Writing was invented less than 6000 years ago.

It is, however, always acceptable to write out numbers up to ninety-nine, and in fact some publishers will insist upon this; if you are writing for publication, you should check:

The bomb killed thirty-seven people and injured over 200 others.

When writing a four-digit numeral in digits (other than a date), American writers never use a comma, but British writers usually do. Hence

Americans write *2000 years* and *3700 people*, while Britons often write *2,000 years* and *3,700 people*.

A five-digit or larger numeral always takes one or more commas:
53,000 refugees, 170,000 cases of AIDS, 2,760,453 patents.

Naturally, we make an exception for addresses and other special cases, in which numerals are always written with digits:
I lived for years at 4 Howitt Road in Belsize Park.

Observe that it is bad style to start a sentence with a numeral: either the number should be written out, or the sentence should be rewritten:
650 MPs sit in Parliament. Six hundred and fifty MPs sit in Parliament.
There are 650 MPs in Parliament.

Fractions are always written with hyphens:
Almost three-fourths of the earth's surface is water. More than one-half of babies born are male.

In formal writing, a fraction is always written out. You should **not** write things like the following:
Almost 75% of the earth's surface is water.

Note: In British usage, a date is written day-month-year, while American usage prefers month-day-year, and then in Sweden they use year-month-day:

The 5th of June 2007

GB 05-06-07

US 06-05-07

SW 07-06-05

@ (at – used commercially) used in electronic mail addresses to separate a user-name from the rest of the address, as in this e-mail address:

c.rossi@unict.it

The ampersand (&) represents the word 'and' in the names of certain companies and legal firms, as in the name *Barton & Maxwell, Solicitors*. Except when citing such a name, you should **never** use an ampersand in place of 'and' in formal writing, nor should you use a plus sign for this purpose. The word 'and' is always written out.

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