

A Simple Guide to Punctuation

Six Common Problems in an Sentence

1. Is the sentence complete?

- Is there a subject?
- Is there a verb?
- What if there's more than one verb?

2. Are any words missing, or are any words inadvertently repeated?

- Read the sentence out loud to help spot missing or extraneous words.

3. Is the sentence punctuated correctly?

4. Are verbs used correctly?

- Does each verb agree with its subject?
- Does the verb tense correctly express when the action takes place (past, present, future, etc.)?

5. Are pronouns used correctly?

- What noun phrase does the pronoun represent? How close together are they? Are there any other noun phrases in between the two?
- Do the pronoun and the noun it refers to agree? (Are they both plural or both singular?)

6. Is everything spelled correctly?

- Run a spell check.
- Remember to check for commonly confused words that computer spell-checkers miss (it/it's, their/there, etc.). Also, keep in mind that computers often don't "know" technical terms and recently invented words, so you'll have to check those yourself.

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Comma

- separates information into readable units
- vital in longer sentences

Apostrophe

- contractions - used to show that something has been left out, and where it has been left out
- possessives - indicates ownership with nouns (btwn noun and s) and with more than one individual (put at end of the word)

Colon

- indicates that a list, quotation or summary is about to follow
- separates an initial sentence/clause from a second clause, list, phrase or quotation

Semicolon

- separates two complete sentences that are, however, closely linked
- serves as a second level of punctuation in a series of words or phrases which already have commas making some divisions

Period

- mark the end of a sentence
- to indicate abbreviated words
- to punctuate numbers and dates

Question Mark

- used at the end of a sentence which is a question

Exclamation Mark

- used at the end of a sentence and indicates surprise, anger, or alarm
- should be used sparingly and are not often used in academic writing