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Licence **1**

**Group: 7(A), 7(B) and 10(A), 10(B)**

**Module: Written Expression**

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**Punctuation and Capitalization**

In writing, we use punctuation marks to make our meaning intelligible to the reader. Every mark of punctuation carries some meaning and gives hints about how to read and interpret the sentence. Similarly, the capitalization of words serves as a guide to their meaning. In this chapter, we will look at the most common situations in written English that require punctuation and capitalization.

1. **Punctuation**

Correct punctuation, like correct spelling and word order, is an essential part of the properly constructed English sentence. It may be said that, as an integral part of the written form of the language, punctuation is the reflection of the pauses and the rising and falling intonation patterns of the spoken language. Hence, the reading of English is affected by sentence punctuation where each mark of punctuation signals the nature of the pauses and the sentence stress that is necessary for comprehension of the full meaning of the sentence. As sentences become the paragraphs of a composition, the continuing effect of good sentence punctuation is more clearly evident. The principal rules are stated here, but on occasion, a good writer may vary them slightly to gain a particular effect in his writing style.

The standard marks of punctuation are **period (full stop) (.)**; **question mark (?)**; **exclamation mark (!)**; **comma (,)**; **semi colon (;);** **dash (--)**; **parenthesis ( );** **brackets [ ]**; **quotation marks (“…”, `…`).**

1. Sentences **end** with a period (a full stop) ,an exclamation mark, or a question mark.

Examples:

* **A** sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a period, the period is often being called a full stop**. (declarative)**
* **W**hat a lovely time we have had**! (exclamatory)**
* **H**ave you seen **S**hakespeare’s **H**amlet**? (interrogative)**
* **H**alt**!** This was the command we heard**.** **(imperative)**

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1. Punctuation **within** the sentence:

a). **Comma (,):**

**(1)** Words, phrases, and clauses **in series** are separated by commas:

**E**xamples:

**-H**e is tall**,** dark**,** and handsome.

**-T**he book tells the story of an old man**,** of his young wife**,** and of many problems of adjustments**.**

**- W**ho he was**,** why he married her**,** what their problems were**,** and how it ended happily**,** are told with all the skill of a good writer**.**

(2) Nouns of **direct address** are set off from the rest of the sentence by **commas:**

Examples:

* **I**mane**,** have you found my books?
* I am going to have my examinations next month**, J**ane.
* **I** know**, M**ounir**,** that you think I have not been studying.

(3) Words, phrases and clauses **in apposition (**called appositives**)** are set off by commas unless they are needed to identify the nouns they follow:

Examples:

-**A**n **A**merican author**, *W****illiam* ***F****aulkner***,** won the **N**obel **P**rize in 1949. **-M**ajda**,** *the poorest student in the class***,** will surely fail. -**A**lice**,** *the same* ***A****lice we saw yesterday***,** is not at school today.

**Note** that the restrictive or limiting clause, as in the sentence “The man who agreed to meet us at ten o’clock is not here yet.”, or : “The poet Poe was an outstanding essayist.” are not set off by commas.

(4) Expressions that indicate some limitation to the thought expressed are set off by commas:

Examples:

-***O****n the one hand,* most of us agree with the new law. -**S**ome people, *however*, have expressed objections to it. -**I**t is still the law of the land, *all things considered*.

(5) Statements or clauses connected by **a coordinating conjunction** **(for, and, nor, but, or, yet,** and **so)** are separated by a comma. (The best way to remember the seven coordinating conjunctions is by using **the** **acronym: FAN BOYS.**

**E**xamples:

-**J**im all the way**, for** he had to get there on time. -**E**verybody expected rain**, and** it never came. -**S**witzerland is not in the European Union**, nor** is it a member of NATO. -**I** eat cakes**, but** I never eat biscuits; I do not like them. - **Y**ou can work hard**, or** you can fail. -There was no air conditioning**, yet** we were cool. **- -T**he bank is closed**, so** we cannot cash the check.

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**Note these sentences:**

James did his homework**, and** Jack read a book. (Compound sentence) James did his homework **and** read a book. (Simple sentence)

Paul will go to a movie**, or** he will stay home. (Compound sentence) Paul will go to a movie **or** stay home. (Simple sentence)

**[No comma is used before the coordinating conjunction in simple sentences.]**

**(6) T**he comma is used with expressions such as *e.g.***,** *i*.e.**,** *namely***,** *that is***,**to introduce an example:

**H**e is asking for a list of items; **that is,** every item must be given.

**(7) A** comma is used to indicate an omitted repetition of a word or phrase:

**A** bus is used for a short trip; a plane**,** for a long one.

**(8) I**n direct discourse (speech) the comma separates the introductory statement from the quotation:

**T**om said**, “Will** you go with us?**”**

**(9) M**iscellaneous uses:

**A**dam **T**urner**, P**h. D.**, Dean. P**astor**,** John **A., J**r. **T**o Jane**,** her husband seemed a hero. **J**anuary 1**,** 1970**,** is the date given to us. **I**n 2021**,** 72 students passed the exam.

b).**S**emi-colon (**;**): As its name implies this mark is an intermediate one, somewhat stronger than the comma, yet not a full stop.

(1) A semi-colon connects closely related independent statements or clauses where no conjunction is used:

Make no mistakes**;** others will make them for you. A wise student studies his lesson**;** an unwise one wastes his time.

(2) A semi-colon is used to separate two statements or clauses when the second one begins with a connector that is a conjunctive adverb: e.g., You have recommended him**;** hence**,** I will see him. His voting record is fine**;** therefore**,** I will vote for him. The telegram will come soon**;** then we will know what to do.

(3) When statements or clauses already have internal punctuation, a semi-colon is used: e.g., **T**he country has rivers**,** mountains**,** and seacoast**;** it needs progressive**,** well-planned transportation systems to make use of these assets**;** then it will become self-supporting.

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c). The colon (**:**) :

(1) The colon is used to introduce a summary of items or a general summation:

e.g., **T**he list showed these words to be identified**:** good, bad, green, red; name, surname; to go, to stay; nearby, far away. **T**here was one thing we had not thought of**:** invasion.

(2) In direct discourse, a colon follows a quotation made up of more than one sentence: e.g., The secretary read from his notes**:** “The meeting was called to order on June 14. The minutes were read and approved. The agenda was read and approved. Old business was discussed and settled by vote.”

(3) Miscellaneous uses: 2**:** 31**:**30 (2 hours, 31 minutes, 30 seconds) 14**:**1 (ratio: fourteen to one) War II 2**:**12 (book, chapter, verse) John: **Well,** (speaker in a dialogue or play) **2: 29:2022** ( date: month, day, year)

(d) The dash (--):

The dash is used in many of the same ways as the comma, semi-colon, and colon: it provides a somewhat sharper break than is usually required however. Therefore, the dash should be used only when strong emphasis seems to be required.

e.g., Some of our most important foodstuff – milk, oil, wheat, rice, and beans**--**are often in short supply. Wheat, rice, beans**—**these are found in short supply. Only two of you—Hamid and Hamada**—**can come along with us.

(e) The parenthesis **( ):**

These marks are used to enclose explanatory words, phrases, and statements where stronger separation than the comma is required. They also enclose explanatory material not directly related to or structurally a part of the sentence. Numbered series in continuing text are usually in **( )**. e.g., Three ships **(**they were old-time sailing vessels**)** were seen in the distance. The diagram **(**Figure 5**)** will explain the process. The cause of the error can be stated as due to **:(1)** incorrect date used, **(2)** careless application of it, **(3)** unrealistic conclusion drawn.

(f).The brackets **[ ]:**

**B**rackets are used to enclose an incidental word or phrase, words used as identification of a word **[in text],** or a comment added by another person or an editor **[for the purpose of explanation]**.

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(g) The apostrophe **(’):**

This mark is used in forming the possessive case and in contraction.

e.g., That’s Mohamed**’s** father. (That **is**) She’s a lovely young girl! (She **is)** I don**’**t like biscuits. (**do not**)

(h). The quotation marks **(“…”),(‘…’):**Standard usage requires the so-called double marks (occasionally a writer will use single marks and then double marks) and single marks for quotation **within** quotation.

**(1)** Direct quotation:

e.g., John was heard to say, **“Let** me tell you that Tom was saying **‘No**, I want do it,**’** before he went home.**”**

**(2)** For material quoted from a book or paper consisting of more than on paragraph of the text, the opening mark is placed at the beginning of the first line of the quotation with the final mark at the end of the completed quotation, but with marks used at the beginning only of the paragraph between.

**(3) U**nusual words or phrases, such as technical terms or special meaning of words, slang, and so on, may be enclosed in quotation marks: e.g., He said that the entire story was **“**phony.**”**

**(4)** The punctuation of quoted material follows the original text as written.

Note these special uses of punctuation:

**H**e asked, **“**Did you go**?” D**id you hear her shout **“**I will not.**”? I** answered, **“**What a thing to say**!” T**he line read, **“**Where you go, I go.**”**

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**II.Capital Letters**

Capital letters are not really an aspect of punctuation, but it is convenient to deal with them here. The rules for using them are mostly very simple.

(a) The first word of a sentence begins with a capital letter:

**D**istressingly few pupils can locate Iraq or Japan on a map of the world. **Y**ou can work hard**, or** you can fail.

(b) The names of the days of the week, and of the months of the year, are written with a capital letter:

Next Sunday France will hold a general election.

Mozart was born on 27 January, 1756.

Football practice takes place on Wednesdays and Fridays.

However, the names of seasons are **not** written with a capital: Like cricket, baseball is played in the summer. Do not write \*"*... in the Summer*".

(c) The names of languages are always written with a capital letter. Be careful about this; it is a very common mistake.

Juliet speaks English, French, Italian and Portuguese.

I need to work on my Spanish irregular verbs.

Among the major languages of India are Hindi, Gujarati and Tamil.

These days, few students study Latin and Greek.

Note, however, that names of disciplines and school subjects are **not** capitalized unless they happen to be the names of languages:

I am doing A-levels in history, geography and English.

Newton made important contributions to physics and mathematics.

She is studying French literature.

(d) Words that express a connection with a particular place must be capitalized when they have their literal meanings. Therefore, for example, *French* must be capitalized when it means `having to do with France':

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The result of the French election is still in doubt.

The American and Russian negotiators are close to agreement.

There are no mountains in the Dutch landscape.

She has a dry Mancunian sense of humour.

(The word *Mancunian* means `from Manchester'.)

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.

Why the difference? Well, a danish pastry is merely a particular sort of pastry; it doesn't have to come from Denmark. Likewise, french windows are merely a particular kind of window, and russian dressing is just a particular variety of salad dressing. Even in these cases, you can capitalize these words if you want to, as long as you are consistent about it. But notice how convenient it can be to make the difference:

In warm weather, we keep our *french* windows open.

After nightfall, *French* windows are always shuttered.

In the first example, *french windows* just refers to a kind of window; in the second, *French windows* refers specifically to windows in France.

(e) In the same vein, words that identify nationalities or ethnic groups must be capitalized:

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.

(An aside: some ethnic labels, which were formerly widely used, are now regarded by many people as offensive and have been replaced by other labels. Thus, careful writers use *Black*, not *Negro*; *native American*, not *Indian* or *red Indian*; *native Australian*, not *Aborigine*. You are advised to follow suit.)

(f) Formerly, the words *black* and *white*, when applied to human beings, were never capitalized. Nowadays, however, many people prefer to capitalize them because they regard these words as ethnic labels comparable to *Chinese* or *Indian*:

The Rodney King case infuriated many Black Americans.

(You may capitalize these words or not, as you prefer, but be consistent.)

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(g) Proper names are always capitalized. A proper name is a name or a title that refers to an individual person, an individual place, an individual institution or an individual event. Here are some examples:

The study of language was revolutionized by Noam Chomsky.

The Golden Gate Bridge towers above San Francisco Bay.

There will be a debate between Professor Lacey and Doctor Davis.

The Queen will address the House of Commons today.

Many people mistakenly believe that Mexico is in South America.

My friend Julie is training for the Winter Olympics.

Next week President Clinton will be meeting Chancellor Kohl.

Observe the difference between the next two examples: We have asked for a meeting with the President. I would like to be the president of a big company.

In the first, the title *the President* is capitalized because it is a title referring to a specific person; in the second, there is no capital, because the word *president* does not refer to anyone in particular. The same difference is made with some other words: we write *the Government*  and *Parliament* when we are referring to a particular government or a particular parliament, but we write *government* and *parliament* when we are using the words generically. In addition, note the following example:

The patron saint of carpenters is Saint Joseph.

Here *Saint Joseph* is a name, but *patron saint* is not and gets no capital.

[A few people eccentrically prefer to write their names with no capital letters at all, such as the poet *e. e. cummings* and the singer *k. d. lang*. These strange usages should be respected.]

(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.

The Greeks were already in Greece during the Bronze Age.

(i) The names of festivals and holy days are capitalized:

We have long breaks at Christmas and Easter.

During Ramadan, one may not eat before sundown.

Our church observes the Sabbath very strictly.

The children greatly enjoy Halloween.

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(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. The Indian cricket team includes Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Parsees. The Lord is my shepherd. The Prophet was born in Mecca.

Note, however, that the word *god* is **not** capitalized when it refers to a pagan deity:

Poseidon was the Greek god of the sea.

(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*.

*The Round Tower* was written by Catherine Cookson.

Bach's most famous organ piece is the *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*.

I don't usually like Cher, but I do enjoy *The Shoop Shoop Song*.

**Important note:** The policy just described is the one most widely used in the English-speaking world. There is, however, a second policy, preferred by many people. In this second policy, we capitalize only the first word of a title and any words, which intrinsically require capitals for independent reasons. Using the second policy, my examples would look like this:

I was terrified by *The silence of the lambs*.

*The round tower* was written by Catherine Cookson.

Bach's most famous organ piece is the *Toccata and fugue in D minor*.

I don't usually like Cher, but I do enjoy *The shoop shoop song*.

You may use whichever policy you prefer, so long as you are consistent about it. You may find, however, that your tutor or your editor insists upon one or the other. The second policy is particularly common (though not universal) in academic circles, and is usual among librarians; elsewhere, the first policy is almost always preferred.

(l) The first word of a [direct quotation](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/informatics/punctuation/quotes/marks), repeating someone else's exact words, is always capitalized if the quotation is a complete sentence:

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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.

King Alfonso XIII handed over power to General Primo de Rivera.

The only common exception is that small Roman numerals are used to number the pages of the front matter in books.

(o) The pronoun *I* is always capitalized:

She thought I'd borrowed her keys, but I hadn't.

It is possible to write an entire word or phrase in capital letters in order to emphasize it:

There is ABSOLUTELY NO EVIDENCE to support this conjecture.

On the whole, though, it is preferable to express emphasis, not with capital letters, but with [italics](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/informatics/punctuation/misc/italics). It is not necessary to capitalize a word merely because there is only one thing it can possibly refer to:

The equator runs through the middle of Brazil.

Admiral Peary was the first person to fly over the north pole.

The universe is thought to be about 15 billion years old.

(Here the words *equator*, *north pole* and *universe* need no capitals, because they aren't strictly proper names. Some people choose to capitalize them anyway; this is not wrong, but it's not recommended.)

Capital letters are also used in writing certain [abbreviations](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/informatics/punctuation/capsandabbr/abbr) and related types of words, including the abbreviated names of organizations and companies, and in [letter writing](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/informatics/punctuation/essaysandletters/letters) and in the [headings of essays](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/informatics/punctuation/essaysandletters/titlesandheadings).

**Don't** use a capital letter unless you're sure you know why it's there.

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**Summary of Capital Letters:**

**Capitalize**

* **the first word of a sentence**
* **the name of a day or a month**
* **the name of a language**
* **a word expressing a connection with a place**
* **the name of a nationality or an ethnic group**
* **a proper name**
* **the name of a historical period**
* **the name of a holiday**
* **a significant religious term**
* **the first word, and each significant word, of a title**
* **the first word of a**[**direct quotation**](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/informatics/punctuation/quotes/marks)**which is a sentence**
* **a brand name**
* **a Roman numeral**
* **the pronoun *I***

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