English Punctuation Marks – Full Guide

Punctuation marks are symbols that help organize writing, make the meaning clear, and show pauses, stops, questions, or emotion. Below are the 14 most commonly used punctuation marks in English with explanations and examples:

1. Full Stop / Period (.)

- *Use:* Ends a complete sentence that is not a question or exclamation.
- *Examples:*

I enjoy reading.

She went to the market.

Tip: Always start a new sentence with a capital letter after a full stop.

2. Comma (,)

- *Use:* To separate items in a list
- After introductory words or phrases
- To separate clauses in a sentence
- Before conjunctions in compound sentences
- *Examples:*

I bought apples, oranges, bananas, and grapes.

After lunch, we went home.

He was tired, but he kept working.

Tip: Don't use a comma between the subject and the verb.

3. Question Mark (?)

- *Use:* At the end of a direct question.
- *Examples:*

What is your name?

Did you finish the homework?

Tip: Do not use a question mark for indirect questions.

Incorrect: I wonder what time it is?

Correct: I wonder what time it is.

4. Exclamation Mark (!)

BENOL ACADEMY

- *Use:* To express strong emotion, surprise, or command.
- *Examples:*

Watch out!

That's amazing!

Tip: Use exclamation marks sparingly in formal writing.

5. Quotation Marks (“ ”)

- *Use:* To show someone's exact spoken or written words

For titles of short works (stories, poems, articles)

- *Examples:*

She said, “I am ready.”

“Honesty is the best policy,” he added.

Tip: In American English, commas and periods go inside the quotation marks.

6. Apostrophe (’)

- *Use:* To show possession

To indicate contractions (missing letters)

- *Examples:*

This is Sarah's pen.

It's raining today. (It is)

Tip: Its = possessive; It's = it is

7. Colon (:)

- *Use:* To introduce a list or explanation

Before a quotation or important point

- *Examples:*

She brought three things: a notebook, a pen, and a ruler.

There's one thing to remember: never give up.

Tip: The part before the colon should be a complete sentence.

8. Semicolon (;)

BENOL ACADEMY

- *Use:* To join two related complete sentences

To separate items in a complex list

- *Examples:*

I wanted to go; she stayed home.

We visited London, England; Paris, France; and Rome, Italy.

Tip: A semicolon is stronger than a comma but weaker than a period.

9. Dash (—)

- *Use:* To add extra information

To show a sudden change or interruption

For emphasis

- *Examples:*

I was walking—just thinking—when it happened.

He's the best player—no doubt about it.

Tip: Don't confuse with the shorter hyphen (-) used to join words.

10. Parentheses ( )

- *Use:* To add extra or less important information

To give examples or explanations

- *Examples:*

He passed the test (after two attempts).

The capital of France (Paris) is beautiful.

Tip: Avoid overusing them in formal writing.

11. Hyphen (-)

- *Use:* To form compound words

To join prefixes to words

When splitting a word at the end of a line (rare in digital writing)

- *Examples:*

BENOL ACADEMY

A well-known author

Re-enter your password

My mother-in-law is visiting.

Tip: Hyphens connect words; dashes separate ideas.

12. Ellipsis (...)

- *Use:*

To show an unfinished thought or pause

To omit words from a quote

- *Examples:*

“I was thinking... maybe we should wait.”

“He said he would come... but he didn’t.”

Tip: Use carefully in formal writing; it's more common in storytelling or dialogue.

13. Slash (/)

- *Use:*

To show choices or alternatives,

In abbreviations, dates, and URLs

- *Examples:*

Please bring your ID and/or passport.

The event is on 14/05/2022

Tip: Avoid using slashes in formal academic writing unless necessary.

14. Brackets [ ]

- *Use:*

To add clarification within a quotation

To show corrections or editorial comments

- *Examples:*

“He [the teacher] gave us homework.”

BENOL ACADEMY

She said she was “very [excited] to be here.”

Tip: Brackets are mostly used in academic or edited writing.

BENOL ACADEMY