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Punctuation and Capitals

Punctuation Marks have a great importance in every language. Punctuation mark make the meaning and sense of the writer clear and precise. Wrong punctuation marks can distort the meaning and cause confusion in the mind of the reader. Sometimes they can completely change the entire meaning. Therefore we give below all the important punctuation marks and explain how and where they are to be used.

The following are the important punctuation marks used in the English Language—

- (1) Full Stop (.)
- (2) Comma (,)
- (3) Colon (:)
- (4) Semicolon (;)
- (5) Mark of Interrogation (?)
- (6) Mark of Exclamation (!)
- (7) Dash (—)
- (8) Parentheses brackets ()
- (9) Inverted commas or Quotation Marks “ ”
- (10) Hyphen (-)
- (11) Apostrophe (')

(1) Full Stop (.)

Rule 1—It is used at the end of every complete **Assertive** or **Imperative** sentence. It is not used at the end of Interrogative or Exclamatory sentences. (After these sentences Interrogative or Exclamatory marks are used.)

Rule 2—A Full Stop is also used after every letter of an Abbreviation. **As**—

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Full stops are also used in such shortened expressions as—etc., e.g., i.e., Ibid., op. cit.

Note—

- (a) Full Stop marks may not be used after every letter in very popular abbreviations. **As**—
UNESCO, UNO, WHO
- (b) Full Stop marks are not used after **Mr** & **Mrs** also.
- (c) 1st, 2nd, 3 rd, 4th, etc. also don't take Full Stop marks after them.

(2) Comma (,)

It is the smallest pause, and is used in the following conditions—

Rule 1—To separate a series of words of the same part of speech from each other. But the number of such words in the same series should not be less than three. Before the last word in the series conjunction '**and**' is added, and before the '**and**' a comma may or may not be used. **As**—

- (i) I have seen Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Bangalore.

(a comma can also be used before '**and**')

- (ii) There are in this zoo all kinds of birds, animals, reptiles, and monkeys.

(The comma before **and** can be removed also.)

Rule 2—To separate **pairs** of words used in the same series. **As**—

- (i) They sell here books and magazines, note-books and diaries, greeting cards and picture-books.

- (ii) High and low, rich and poor, proud and humble, all assemble here.

Rule 3—To separate two or more than two **Adverb** or **Adjective phrases** coming after each other. **As**—

- (i) Then, after waiting for more than an hour, we saw him coming out.

- (ii) Thereupon, at last, he broke down.

Rule 4—To separate small co-ordinate clauses in a compound sentence. **As**—

- (i) He came, he saw, he conquered.
- (ii) The weather was pleasant, the wind was calm, the hills all round were green.

- (iii) Storms may blow and clouds may burst, but I must go.

(No Comma is used when two co-ordinate clauses are connected with a co-ordinate conjunction)

Rule 5—To mark a Nominative of Address or Vocative Subject. **As**—

- (i) Ram, what are you doing ?
- (ii) Milton, thou should'st be living at this hour !
- (iii) What will you do now, my friend ?

Rule 6—To separate a **Nominative Absolute**. **As**—

- (i) This done, we shall proceed further.
- (ii) The weather being pleasant, we proposed to go on a picnic.
- (iii) Having reached there, he addressed a public meeting.

Rule 7—To separate a **Noun** and its **Phrase in Apposition**. A comma is placed on both the sides of such Nouns or Phrases. **As**—

- (i) Nelson, the great wrestler, has won.
- (ii) Milton, the great poet, was blind.
- (iii) Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, is worshipped as an apostle.

Rule 8—On both the sides of a phrase that can be developed into a sentence, and which is not merely a qualifying phrase. **As**—

- (i) Gandhi, having acquired the degree of Bar-at-Law, returned to India.
- (ii) Our team, having won the series, returned last month.

Rule 9—On both the sides of some typical words, phrases or clauses used within a sentence. **As**—

- (i) He, however, did not return before sunset.
- (ii) He is, after all, your brother and you must help him.

- (iii) Let us not, I pray you, part like this.

- (iv) Your behaviour, in my opinion, is not courteous.

Rule 10—In place of a word left out in a sentence, specially a verb (left out as understood). **As**—

- (i) He received a medal; I, a prize.
- (ii) You went to Calcutta; he, to Bombay.
- (iii) He secured first division; you, second.

Rule 11—To separate an Adverbial clause from the Principal clause. But if the Adverbial clause comes after the Principal clause, no comma is used. **As**—

- (i) If you go to office, please submit my application.
- (ii) When I was at Kanpur, I met your father.
- (iii) Inform me when you come back.

Rule 12—A comma is placed between the name of a person and his Degrees or Titles. If there are several Degrees, a comma is placed after each Degree. **As**—

B.K. Acharya, M.A., Ph.D., D. Litt.

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Governor of Uttar Pradesh.

Rule 13—A comma is also used between a long Subject and its Verb. **As**—

- (i) All that he said before he set sail, was long remembered by all.
- (ii) Whatever he spoke from the pulpit on the Christmas day, turned out to be true.

Rule 14—To separate a Noun Clause from the Verb of the principal clause, if the Noun clause comes immediately before the Principal Verb. **As**—

- (i) Whatever is, is right.
- (ii) Whoever comes, is welcome.
- (iii) That he is a rogue, no one could believe.

Rule 15—To separate a **Direct quotation** from the rest of the sentence. **As**—

- (i) He said, "I am a sailor."
- (ii) "What will you do", he asked, "if I withdraw my help ?"
- (iii) "Go home", said my father, "and help your brother."

(3) Colon (: or :—)

After Full Stop the next complete pause is expressed by colon. The colon is written as (:) or (:—). It is used in the following cases :

Rule 1—Before writing a Quotation. **As**—

Bacon says : “Reading maketh a full man, writing an exact man, speaking a ready man.”

Rule 2—Before drawing a list of some articles or giving examples. **As**—

- (i) The principal cities of India are : Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Bangalore, etc.
- (ii) Pencils, pens, rubbers, paper, ink : these are the articles sold here.

Rule 3—Before grammatically independent but closely connected sentences. **As**—

He can never deceive anyone : he is an absolutely honest man.

(4) Semicolon (;)

Semicolon is used in the following cases—

Rule 1—Between the clauses of a compound sentence when these clauses can be converted into complete independent sentences.

- (i) He is the strongest candidate; even his rivals admit this fact.
- (ii) This is the best book available here; all good students read this book.

Rule 2—To separate Co-ordinate clauses in a compound sentence when they are connected by a conjunction, and when commas have also been used in them. **As**—

- (i) He was a brave, respectable person; and he was loved and admired by all.
- (ii) The event was thrilling, exciting and momentous; and everyone watched it with bated breath.

Rule 3—A **Semicolon** is also used between the co-ordinate clauses of a compound sentence, which are not joined by any conjunction and which have their separate subjects. **As**—

- (i) The train halted; the passengers rushed forward; the vendors and hawkers had their good sale.

- (ii) The bell rang; the students assembled for prayer; the Principal addressed them; the day's work was resumed.

(5) Mark of Interrogation (?)

Mark of Interrogation is used at the end of an Interrogative sentence in the Direct Interrogative form. **As**—

- (i) Are you going home ?
- (ii) Do you know him ?
- (iii) Why do you want to meet him ?

But in Indirect Narration the Interrogative sentence is converted into an Assertive sentence, and therefore a Full Stop is used in place of Mark of Interrogation.

- (i) He asked me whether I was going home.
- (ii) He asked me why I wanted to meet him.

(6) Mark of Exclamation (!)

Mark of Exclamation is used at the end of an Exclamatory sentence, or after an Interjection or any word or phrase suggestive of some sudden feeling.

- (i) Alas ! he is ruined.
- (ii) What a terrible sight it was !
- (iii) May you live long !

(7) Dash (—)

Dash is used in the following cases—

Rule 1—In case of sudden stoppage or change of thought or feeling—

If I were born in those exciting times—
but what is the use of such broodings ?

Rule 2—To collect scattered or stray thoughts—

Houses, cottages, farm-houses, cattle-sheds, grain-stocks—all were damaged in the floods.

(8) Parentheses (brackets)

Parenthetic words, phrases and clauses are written within brackets. They keep the Parentheses separate from the main sentence. The Parentheses have no grammatical connection with the main sentence. **As**—

He gained from Heaven (it was all he wished) a friend. (**Gray**)

(9) Inverted Commas (“ — ”)

Inverted commas are used to mark out the exact words of a speaker or a quotation. Double Inverted commas are used at the beginning and end of a statement or a quotation using exact words. If there is a quotation within a quotation, the internal quotation is closed within **Single Inverted commas**, and the whole sentence or quotation within **Double Inverted commas**. As—

He said, “I have consulted several literary reference books, but I have not been able to understand the correct meaning of ‘Child is father of the man’.”

(10) Hyphen (-)

The mark of Hyphen is smaller than the dash, and it is used to make compound words. As—

Father-in-law; man-of-war; passer-by.

It is also used to connect the first part of a word written at the end of a line, the second part of which is carried over to the beginning of the next line. As—

He said that he was going to **rusti-
cate** the naughty boy.

(11) Apostrophe (')

Rule 1—Apostrophe is used to make a Possessive Case. As—

Ram’s house, Mohan’s book, Girls’ School.

Rule 2—Sometimes some words are shortened by dropping out some letters from their spellings, and in place of those letters an Apostrophe is used. As—

- (i) He **didn’t** go. (*i.e.* **did not**)
- (ii) **I’ve ne’er** seen him. (*i.e.* I have never seen him.)

Rule 3—To write **O’clock** & It is 5 O’clock.

Rule 4—To make Plurals of Letters and Figures.

- (i) **2’s** , **5’s** .
- (ii) He has not cut his **t’s** .
- (iii) His **m’s** are not readable.

Use of Capital Letters

Capital Letters: Capital Letters are used in the following cases—

- (1) The **first letter** of the **first word** of a sentence is written with a capital letter.

The bell is ringing.

Have you done your work ?

- (2) Every new line of a poem begins with a capital letter.

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky :

So was it when my life began,

So is it now when I am a man.

- (3) All Proper Nouns or Adjectives formed by Proper Nouns begin with a capital letter. All Surnames also begin with capital letters. If a name has two or more parts, all parts begin with a capital letter.

New Delhi; Bombay; John Keats;

Sir Walter Raleigh; Dr. R.B. Mazumdar;

INDIAN CULTURE, NEPALI

- (4) Every letter of an Abbreviation is capital.

U.N.O. ; U.S.A. ; N.A.T.O. ;

M.A. ; M.B.B.S.

- (5) All Nouns and Pronouns used for God begin with capital letters.

God; Lord; the Almighty;

God and His moral order;

God has thousands at His command.

- (6) Pronoun **I** and Interjection **O** are always written in capital form.

This is all that **I** can do for you.

O ! for a beaker of vintage.

Exercise

(1) Punctuate the following sentences—

1. A student should be sincere devoted industrious and well behaved.
2. Sir I can do this easily.
3. As Caesar loved me I weep for him as he was fortunate I rejoice at it as he was valiant I honour him but as he was ambitious I slew him.
4. All that I am all that I hope to be I owe to my uncle.
5. Shakespeare the great dramatist was an Englishman.
6. A statesman should be cool patient far-sighted and selfless.

7. Some are born great some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them.
8. Even a fool before he speaks appears wise.
9. The student finding his notebooks gutted in fire cried I am ruined.
10. He therefore came down and talked to the stranger.
11. When you come next time please bring my book.
12. Alas he has drowned
13. Who is there let me know who will help you
14. The teacher stood in the class and said I will teach you Milton today.
15. What a horrible accident it was
16. I believe moreover that he will not come for I know him so well.
17. The following is the list of books I need
18. He came he stayed with me he dined with me and yet he did not appear to be friendly.
19. Japan the land of the rising sun is highly industrialized.
20. This is Rams house though he does not live here.
21. The President said My countrymen let us celebrate our Republic Day with all gaiety.
22. I have visited many countries England America Canada Japan and China.
23. In fact there was nothing for me to do and so I sat idle.
24. My friends however having finished their work came to visit me in the night.
25. He is a cruel thoughtless and haughty man.

Exercise

(2) Punctuate the following passages, using capital letters where necessary —

- (1) You are wiser now than you were then king midas said the stranger looking seriously at him your heart i perceive has not been entirely changed from the flesh to gold were it so your case would indeed be desperate but you appear to be still capable of understanding that the commonest things such as lie within everybodys grasp are more valuable than the riches which so many mortals sigh and

struggle for tell me now do you sincerely desire to be rid of this golden touch

- (2) On december 13 1939 three british ships ajax exeter and achilles under commander henry harwood fought the german battleship admiral graf spee in the atlantic two of the british ships had 6 inch guns and one had 8 inch guns while the enemy ship had six 11 inch guns.
- (3) emotion is a state of the mind many ordinary words like anger fear happiness sorrow etc describe different kinds of emotions one can study human emotions in several ways for instance one can group different emotions according to their characteristics most emotions may be grouped into two major groups those that produce a feeling of pleasantness in the individual and others that produce the feeling of unpleasantness.
- (4) Love describes a variety of behaviour like experience of parent child affection protective reaction friendship attachment between men and women or attachment to places or things or events in other words love is an impulse or an instinct and is not learnt through experience
- (5) At one end of the road there was a small market from where our maid servant brought us a basketful of mangoes cashews and of course fish which was the main diet of the people there at the other end there was a factory which used not manual labour but all kinds of machinery to roast and pack cashews in air tight tins so came an industry in the village.

Solution of the Above Passages

- (1) “You are wiser now than you were then, King Midas !” said the stranger looking seriously at him. “Your own heart, I perceive, has not been entirely changed from the flesh to gold. Were it so, your case would, indeed, be desperate. But you appear to be still capable of understanding that the commonest things such as lie within everybody’s grasp are more valuable than the riches which so many mortals sigh and struggle for. Tell me now, do you sincerely desire to be rid of this Golden Touch ?”

- (2) On December 13, 1939, three British ships—‘Ajax’, ‘Exeter’ and ‘Achilles’—under Commander Henry Harwood fought the German battleship ‘Admiral Graf Spee’ in the Atlantic. Two of the British ships had 6-inch guns and one had 8-inch guns, while the enemy ship had six 11-inch guns.
- (3) Emotion is a state of the mind. Many ordinary words like anger, fear, happiness, sorrow, etc., describe different kinds of emotions. One can study human emotions in several ways. For instance, one can group different emotions according to their characteristics. Most emotions may be grouped into two major groups—those that produce a feeling of pleasantness in the individual, and others that produce the feeling of unpleasantness.
- (4) Love describes a variety of behaviour like experience of parent-child affection, protective reaction, friendship, attachment between men and women, or attachment to places or things or events. In other words, love is an impulse or an instinct, and is not learnt through experience.
- (5) At one end of the road there was a small market from where our maid-servant brought us a basketful of mangoes, cashews and, of course, fish which was the main diet of the people there. At the other end, there was a factory which used not manual labour, but all kinds of machinery to roast and pack cashews in air-tight tins. So came an industry in the village !