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SUBJECT: FUNCTIONAL ENGLISH

Punctuation:

Punctuation is the system of signs or symbols given to a reader to show how a sentence is constructed and how it should be read. Sentences are the building blocks used to construct written accounts. They are complete statements. Punctuation shows how the sentence should be read and makes the meaning clear.

The most common punctuation marks in English are capital letters and full stops, question marks, commas, colons and semi-colons, exclamation marks, and quotation marks.

In speaking, we use pauses and intonations to make clear what we say. Punctuation plays a similar role in writing, making it easier to read.

Punctuation contains both rules and regulations. There are punctuation rules to follow, but there are writing sessions that give writers the option.

Punctuation: capital letters (B, D) and full stops (.):

We use capital letters to mark the beginning of a sentence and we use stops to mark the end of a sentence:

We went to France last summer. We are amazed at how easy it is to walk on the sidewalk.

The Soccer World Cup Continues every four years. The next World Cup will be held in South Africa. In 2006 it was held in Germany.

We also use capital letters at the beginning of proper nouns. Appropriate names include names of people (including degrees before names), nationality and language, days of the week and months of the year, public holidays and places of origin:

Dr David James is a consultant at Leeds City Hospital.

They are planning a long vacation in New Zealand.

Can you speak Japanese?

The next group meeting will be on Thursday.

What are your plans for the Chinese New Year?

We use capital letters for titles of books, magazines and newspapers, plays and music:

'Oliver' is music based on the novel 'Oliver Twist' by Charles Dickens.

The Straits Times is an English daily newspaper in Singapore.

They performed Beethoven's Sixth Symphony.

Punctuation: question marks (?) and exclamation marks (!):

We use question marks to make clear that what is said is a question.

When we use a question mark, we do not use a full stop:

Why do they make so many mistakes?

A: So you're Harry's cousin?

B: Yes. That's right.

We use exclamation marks to indicate an exclamative clause or expression in informal writing. When we want to emphasize something

in informal writing, we sometimes use more than one exclamation mark:
Listen!

Oh no!!! Please don't ask me to phone her. She'll talk for hours!!!

Punctuation: commas (,):

We use commas to separate a list of similar words or phrases:

It's important to write in clear, simple, accurate words.

They were more friendly, more talkative, more open than last time we met them.

We do not normally use a comma before and at the end of a list of single words:

They travelled through Bulgaria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland.

American English does use a comma in lists before and:

We took bread, cheese, and fruit with us.

We use commas to separate words or phrases that mark where the voice would pause slightly:

I can't tell you now. However, all will be revealed tomorrow at midday.

We had, in fact, lost all of our money.

James, our guide, will accompany you on the boat across to the island.

Separating clauses with commas:

When main clauses are separated by and, or, but, we don't normally use a comma if the clauses have the same subject. However, we sometimes use commas if the clauses have different subjects:

They were very friendly and invited us to their villa in Portugal. (same subject)

Footballers these days earn more money but they are fitter and play many more matches. (same subject)

It was an expensive hotel in the centre of Stockholm, but we decided it was worth the money. (different subjects)

When a subordinate clause comes before the main clause, we commonly use a comma to separate the clauses. However, we do not always do this in short sentences:

If you get lost in the city centre, please don't hesitate to text us or phone us.

If you get lost just phone us.

When we use subordinate or non-finite comment clauses to give further details or more information, we commonly use commas to separate the clauses:

You do need to wear a darker jacket, if I may say so.

To be honest, I thought they were very very rude.

Commas and relative clauses:

We use commas to mark non-defining clauses. Such clauses normally add extra, non-essential information about the noun or noun phrase:

The ambulance, which arrived after just five minutes, took three people to the hospital immediately.

Hong Kong, where the first ASEAN meeting was held, is a very different city now.

The same is true for non-finite clauses:

The storm, lasting as it did for several days, caused serious damage to villages near the coast.

Commas and speech forms:

We commonly separate tags and yes-no responses with commas:

They are going to the party, aren't they?

No, thank you. I've already eaten too much.

We also usually separate vocatives, discourse markers and interjections with commas:

Open the door for them, Kayleigh, can you. Thanks. (vocative)

Well, what do you think we should do about it? (discourse marker)

Wow, that sounds really exciting. (interjection)

We use commas to show that direct speech is following or has just occurred:

He said in his opening speech, 'Now is the time to plan for the future.'
(or He said in his opening speech: 'Now is the time to plan for the future.')

When the direct speech is first, we use a comma before the closing of the quotation marks:

'We don't want to go on holiday to the same place every year,' he said impatiently.

Punctuation: colons (:) and semi-colons (;):

We use colons to introduce lists:

There are three main reasons for the success of the government: economic, social and political.

We also use colons to indicate a subtitle or to indicate a subdivision of a topic:

Life in Provence: A Personal View

We often use colons to introduce direct speech:

Then he said: 'I really cannot help you in any way.'

We commonly use a colon between sentences when the second sentence explains or justifies the first sentence:

Try to keep your flat clean and tidy: it will sell more easily.

We use semi-colons instead of full stops to separate two main clauses. In such cases, the clauses are related in meaning but are separated grammatically:

Spanish is spoken throughout South America; in Brazil the main language is Portuguese.

Semi-colons are not commonly used in contemporary English. Full stops and commas are more common.

Punctuation: quotation marks ('...' or "..."):

Quotation marks in English are '...' or "...". In direct speech, we enclose what is said within a pair of single or double quotation marks, although single quotation marks are becoming more common. Direct speech begins with a capital letter and can be preceded by a comma or a colon:

She said, "Where can we find a nice Indian restaurant?" (or She said: 'Where can we find a nice Indian restaurant?')

We can put the reporting clause in three different positions. Note the position of commas and full stops here:

The fitness trainer said, 'Don't try to do too much when you begin.' (quotation mark after comma introducing speech and after full stop)

'Don't try to do too much when you begin,' the fitness trainer said. (comma before closing quotation mark)

'Don't try to do too much,' the fitness trainer said, 'when you begin.' (commas separating the reporting clause)

When we use direct speech inside direct speech, we use either single quotation marks inside double quotation marks, or double quotation marks inside single quotation marks:

"It was getting really cold," he said, "and they were saying 'When can we go back home?'"

Jaya said, 'They were getting really excited and were shouting "Come on!"'

We commonly use question marks inside the quotation marks unless the question is part of the reporting clause:

'Why don't they know who is responsible?' they asked.

So did they really say 'We will win every match for the next three weeks'?

We also use single quotation marks to draw attention to a word. We can use quotation marks in this way when we want to question the exact meaning of the word:

I am very disappointed by his 'apology'. I don't think he meant it at all.

Punctuation: dashes (-) and other punctuation marks:

Dashes are more common in informal writing. They can be used in similar ways to commas or semi-colons. Both single and multiple dashes may be used:

Our teacher - who often gets cross when we're late - wasn't cross at all. No one could believe it!

Punctuation: numerals and punctuation:

In British English the date is usually given in the order day, month, year.

We use full stops in dates. Forward slashes or dashes are also commonly used:

Date of birth: 1.8.1985 (or 1/8/1985 or 1-8-1985)