

Punctuation (Advanced).

The basic rules of punctuation.

Activity 1:

Underline all the spelling and punctuation mistakes that you can find in the passage below.

a suitable case for training

training is the subject of heated debate at the moment and the focus of a concerted government effort to improve standards and increase its provision throughout industry the arguments have raged back and forth in recent years depending on the viewpoint of the speaker with any shortcomings in the system blamed either on the government currently in power the one before it the trade unions teachers industry or failing all these the foreign countries which are offering are trained workers better salaries and conditions abroad predictable the labor parties employment spokesman tony blair attacked employment secretary michael howard for dropping broad targets for skill levels in the workforce saying that a labor government would re-establish vocational training targets as a guarantee of public spending on training henry mcLeish labors training spokesman went as far as saying britain has the worst record for training of its workforce in the european community figures called from an ec labor market survey carried out in 1989 show that only 38% of britains industrial workers were classified as skilled compared with 80% of french and 62% of german industrial workers but this kind of view is not confined to the left the engineers and managers association a body with 41000 members 15000 of which are chartered and incorporated engineers working in british industry has conducted its own survey how a shortage of engineers and technicians is crippling british industry.

The Passage makes little sense as it is and it is difficult to read. At the end of the study pack this exercise will be repeated. By this time, you will have learned some of the rules and techniques.

Part A is concerned with the correct use of punctuation. Many people are unsure of how to use punctuation correctly, but they know that it should be used so they throw a handful of full stops, commas and semi-colons at their piece of written work after they have completed it and just hope that all the bits fall in the right places.

A point worth remembering is that poor use or over use of punctuation is as bad as no punctuation at all, and inhibits effective communication in just the same way, so learn the basic rules (which are actually quite easy) and you won't go far wrong.

This part is divided into a number of sub-sections:

- the sentence, capital letters and full stops;
- the comma;
- the semi-colon;
- the apostrophe;
- the colon.

The sentence, capital letters and full stops.

"A sentence always begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop."

This is a basic rule and you can probably apply it perfectly well, but it does rather beg one question; do you know exactly what comprises a sentence? Many people get muddled and really aren't sure of the difference between a sentence and a phrase, so the following is a brief look at the definition of a sentence.

A sentence is a group of words which expresses a complete thought or statement. A phrase, on the other hand, is a group of words which are incomplete and do not make sense on their own.

Examples of phrases are:

- "was walking down the road",
- "was approaching the chip shop",
- "burst open",
- "staggered out onto the pavement",
- "fell down the drain".

If you look at these phrases, you will see that they are incomplete statements because they don't tell us who or what the phrases are about i.e. they don't provide a subject.

We can turn them into complete sentences by providing subjects ourselves:

- "George was walking down the road."
- "He was approaching the chip shop."
- "The door of the chip shop burst open."
- "A crowd of drunken revellers staggered out onto the pavement."
- "Their chips fell down the drain."

Besides this being a complete waste of chips, you can see how by adding a subject to each phrase, the phrases have been turned into complete sentences?

A sentence, therefore, is said to consist of a "**subject**" and a "**predicate**".

The **subject** is the person, thing or idea that the sentence is about.

The **predicate** is the rest of the sentence which tells us something about the subject.

Activity 2:

For each sentence below, underline the subject and circle the predicate.

Michael Jackson is a well-known pop singer.

His records are sold in great numbers all over the world.

Thousands of pounds are spent by his record company on publicity each year.

Jackson himself is said to have been a millionaire by the age of thirty.

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Activity 2 Response:

Subject:

Michael Jackson

His records

Thousands of pounds

Jackson himself

Predicate:

is a well-known pop singer.

are sold in great numbers all over the world.

are spent by his record company on publicity each year.

is said to have been a millionaire by the age of thirty.

Activity 3:

Apply the rule "A sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop" by dividing the following paragraph up into complete sentences.

david johnson is always the first person in his office to arrive at work his first job of the day is to put the kettle on when his colleagues arrive they make themselves a coffee before doing anything else they then sit at their desks and open the mail their boss often calls a meeting very early in the morning because of this they dare not be late for work

Activity 3 Response:

Here is an example of how the paragraph can be divided up:

David Johnson is always the first person in his office to arrive at work.

His first job of the day is to put the kettle on. When his colleagues arrive they always make themselves a coffee before doing anything else. They can sit at their desks and open the mail. Their boss often calls a meeting early in the morning. Because of this they dare not be late for work.

This was a basic exercise, but one thing the activity did throw up is the use of capital letters other than at the beginning of the sentence. A capital letter should have been used for both parts of David Johnson's name, and not just for "David" because it was the first word in the sentence.

As a general rule, capitals are always used for:

- The first word in a sentence.
- Proper names or titles e.g.: Jean, Queen Elizabeth, The Pope, London, Dr Crippen, Wiltshire, Paul Newman, The Prime Minister.
- The word "I" (meaning yourself).
- The important words in a title, e.g.: "A Kind of Loving" by Stan Barstow; "Access into Engineering"; "Gone with the Wind".

If you are in doubt about which words in a title are important and which aren't, use capital letters for them all; you won't be wrong.

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The comma.

The comma (,) is one of the most commonly misused forms of punctuation in that it is so often over-used. An example of this was seen in a factory:

“This gate, will not be left, open unattended, by order of, the supervisor.”

Obviously, there are far too many commas in this short sentence. It would be better written as: “This gate will not be left open unattended, by order of the supervisor.”

There are 4 rules about the use of the comma; these are:

- To separate items in a list.
- To separate adjectives (describing words) when several are used.
- Around words or phrases which interrupt or add detail to a sentence.
- To separate statements in a long sentence.

Here are some examples of the use of the comma:

To separate items in a list:

“For my supper that evening I had chips, baked beans, sausages, a grilled tomato and a slice of bread and butter.”

Note that there is no comma preceding ‘and’.

To separate adjectives when several are used:

“It was a cold, dark, wet and windy evening and I was glad to be indoors”.

Around words which interrupt or add detail to a sentence:

“David, however, had gone out to the pub to play darts.”

To separate statements in a long sentence:

“The road to the pub, which was about a mile or so away, was poorly lit, passing as it did through the woods at the edge of the village.”

If you can remember these four rules, then you should have no problem with when to use the comma in your written work.

Activity 4:

Use the rules to help you to insert the comma in the appropriate places in the sentences.

- a) When David got to the pub he saw that the car park was almost deserted.
- b) The inside of the pub was gloomily decorated in green brown dark-blue and gold.
- c) “What are you having?” asked the landlord as David approached the bar.
- d) David asked for a pint of lager a packet of crisps and a pickled egg.
- e) He took his drink to a seat in the far corner of the room stepping over a Labrador dog which was lying by the fire as he did so and almost spilling his beer in the process.

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f) "Come here Bruno and be quick about it" said the landlord to the dog.

Activity 4 Response:

An example of punctuating this exercise would be:

- a) When David got to the pub, he saw that the car park was almost deserted.
- b) The inside of the pub was gloomily decorated in green, brown, dark-blue and gold.
- c) "What are you having?" asked the landlord, as David approached the bar.
- d) David asked for a pint of lager, a packet of crisps and a pickled egg.
- e) He took his drink to a seat in the far corner of the room, stepping over a Labrador dog which was lying by the fire as he did so, and almost spilling his drink in the process.
- f) "Come here, Bruno, and be quick about it," said the landlord to the dog.

Don't worry if your responses weren't exactly the same as in the response; there is still room to manoeuvre, even within the rules. For instance, there is a comma after "landlord" in sentence 3 but it wouldn't necessarily be wrong if it wasn't there.

There is a rule that says, "you never put a comma and the word "and" together". That's certainly true for rules 1 and 2. Notice the examples I have given that between the two items in the list, or the last adjectives used, I have used "and" instead of a comma, to link the words rather than separate them, and so make the sentence flow as it ends.

However, when separating phrases within a long sentence, it's sometimes necessary to place a comma next to "and", and it is perfectly acceptable to do so. Here is an example of this point:

"David felt uncomfortable in the bar, almost as though someone was watching him and, just as he looked up, he saw a pair of eyes peering through the half-closed curtains."

The main point you should remember when using the comma is "**Don't overdo it**".

If in doubt, leave it out.

The semi-colon.

The semi-colon (;) often throws people into more confusion than the comma, and yet it is even simpler to use as there are only 2 rules relating to its use. These are:

- To separate long items in a list.
- To separate two parts of a sentence, each of which would stand on its own as a complete sentence, but which are related to each other by their subject matter.

This second rule may seem very complicated, but in fact it's not, once you've got the hang of it. Here are two examples of the use of the semi-colon:

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To separate long items in a list.

David looked away from the window and studied the landlord carefully. He was wearing a white shirt with a frayed collar; a dark brown pullover which had a stain on the front; a black jacket which had obviously seen better days; brown corduroy trousers with turnips and black slip-on shoes.

To separate two parts of a sentence, each of which could stand alone as a complete sentence but which are connected by their subject matter.

“David looked back at the window; the eyes were still peering in at the bar”.

Notice in the second example that you could use a full stop instead of a semi-colon. You wouldn't be wrong to do so as both parts of the sentence are full sentences in their own right. The semi-colon is used here to show the connection between them.

Activity 5:

Place the semi-colons in the appropriate places in the sentences.

- David looked wildly round the bar, noticing the décor. Over the mantelpiece there was a picture of a horse race with three fallen horses a stuffed owl in a glass case a grimy mirror with a crack in one corner and some rather dirty horse brasses.
- He suddenly realised that he was the only person in the bar he wondered why there was no-one else there.
- He drank his lager and made a bolt for the door he was really frightened now.

Activity 5 Response:

- David looked wildly round the bar, noticing the décor. Over the mantelpiece there was a picture of a horse race with three fallen horses; a stuffed owl in a glass case; a grimy mirror with a crack in one corner and some rather dirty horse brasses.
- He suddenly realised he was the only person in the bar; he wondered why there was no-one else there.
- He drank his lager and made a bolt for the door; he was really frightened now.

Notice that where a semi-colon is used instead of a full stop, as in 2 and 3 above, it's necessary to use a capital letter at the beginning of the second part of the sentence.

If you go back to the section on the sentence, capital letters and full stops, you will see that the examples about George and his trip to the chip-shop could, in fact, be turned into longer sentences simply by changing some of the full stops to semi-colons and removing the capital letters after them.

For example: George was walking down the road; he was approaching the chip shop.

The door of the chip shop burst open. A crowd of drunken revellers staggered out onto the pavement; their chips fell down the drain.”

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The apostrophe.

The apostrophe (') is probably misplaced more often than any other punctuation mark.

It has 2 uses which are:

- To show possession.
- To show omission.

Here are some examples of the uses of the apostrophe:

To show possession:

"The landlord's dog got up suddenly and blocked David's route to the door"

(Notice that the apostrophe is used to show the dog belonging to the landlord and the route "belonging" to David.)

To show omission:

"You can't get away with this," shouted David. "I don't know what's going on here, but I don't like it."

(Notice that the apostrophe is used here when two words have been joined together to make one. This is called a "contraction" and the apostrophe is placed at the point where a letter or letters have been omitted.)

Hence: "can not" becomes "can't".

"do not" becomes "don't".

And "what is" becomes "what's".

Activity 6:

Place the apostrophe in its correct position in the short paragraph below.

"Don't panic old chap," said the landlord. "Nothings wrong. Your wife said its your birthday today and we thought that as youre new to the area, wed give you a bit of a do to make you feel at home. Sorry the dog tripped you up. Its got arthritis in its hind legs and falls all over the place sometimes. Its all your wifes idea. Look, shes here now."

Activity 6 Response:

"Don't panic old chap," said the landlord. "Nothing's wrong. Your wife said it's your birthday today and we thought that as you're new to the area, we'd give you a bit of a do to make you feel at home. Sorry the dog tripped you up. It's got arthritis in its hind legs and falls all over the place sometimes. It's all your wife's idea. Look, she's here now."

There are two things you should remember when using the apostrophe:

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- Be careful with its and it's. Only use the apostrophe when you need a contraction of "it is" or "it has". E.g. "The dog wagged its tail. It's a nice dog really."
- When adding 's to show possession (e.g.: David's birthday), be careful with words that end in "s". In the case of a word ending in "s", add only the apostrophe and not the "s". E.g. the book belonging to Charles, becomes Charles' book, while Paris' night-clubs means the night clubs of Paris.

The Colon.

The colon ':' is a punctuation mark which is often either misused, or simply not used at all, because many people are unsure of how to use it.

Basically, it has 3 uses, all of which are concerned with an introduction.

- To introduce a list of items.
- To introduce a quotation, (although in this case a comma is more often used.)
- To introduce a statement which is an example, an enlargement or an explanation of an initial statement.

Here are some examples:

To introduce a list of items:

"What would you like to drink," asked the landlord: "beer, wine or a short?"

To introduce a quotation:

David looked at him and said: "A large whisky, please".

To introduce a statement which expands on an earlier statement:

The bar, which had previously been empty, suddenly filled with noise and activity: people poured in through the door and began ordering drinks and playing the juke-box.

Activity 7:

Use colons in the sentences below:

I said I hadn't known what to wear my red dress, my blue suit or my green trouser suit.

David looked all around him at the people enjoying themselves all were happy and having fun.

He said "What a super surprise party it's really great."