

PUNCTUATION

Commonly Confused

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A **semicolon** connects two independent, related clauses.

Example: Chancellor’s Walk can be a dangerous place; pedestrians have to be on alert to avoid getting hit by a biker or skateboarder.

These clauses could be separated by a period, but a semicolon eliminates the pause between sentences.

Use a **colon** to introduce an explanation, an example, an appositive, a series, a list, or a quotation.

Example: I am still deciding where my destination will be next Spring Break: Florida, California, or New York City.

Example: Lunsford warns against the misuse of colons in *Easy Writer*: “Do not put a colon between a verb and its object” (124).

Colons and semicolons go outside the quotation marks.

Dashes are used to highlight certain material in a text or insert a comment about the text.

Example: A few people in my class – Jesse, Kelsey, Jack, and Margaret – were accepted to the Master’s program.

Using a single dash can also emphasize information at the end of text.

Example: All my friends were accepted to the Master’s program – the program I am still waiting to hear back from.

A **hyphen** brings two words together to form a compound word.

Examples: sixty-four, sugar-coated strawberries, well-known professor

To form a dash, press the hyphen key twice. For hyphens, press it once.

Apostrophes are used to indicate possession or to form a contraction.

Possession

Example: That is Joe’s skateboard, not mine.

The skateboard belongs to Joe; therefore, an apostrophe is used before the “S.”

For a name that ends in an “S,” put the apostrophe at the end without an “S” following it, or you can put an apostrophe “S” at the end. Either is acceptable for proper names only.

Example: That is Charles’ skateboard, not mine.

Example: That is Charles’s skateboard, not mine.

Example: The two actresses’ hats were identical.

(over)

Contraction

Example: I can't believe someone stole Joe's skateboard!
Can't is a contraction for cannot, so an apostrophe must be used.

Be careful when using "its" and "it's."
"Its" indicates possession, while "it's" is a contraction meaning "it is."

Use **quotation marks** to signal a direct quotation to the reader.

Example: The author states, "Edgar Allen Poe was mainly a poet and short story writer, but he did publish one novel during his career."

If during the dialogue the speaker quotes something, use single quotation marks for the inside quote.

Example: Sarah explains, "The poem 'The Raven' is my favorite one by Edgar Allen Poe."

Always place commas inside the quotation mark.

Example: "I became insane," said Poe, "with long intervals of horrible sanity."

Place questions marks, exclamation points, and dashes inside the quotation marks if they are part of the quote. **Place them outside the quotation marks if they are not.**

Example: The teacher asked, "Who would like to read the poem aloud to the class?"

Example: What is the theme of "The Raven"?

Lunsford, Andrea A. *Easy Writer*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002. Print.
Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. Print.

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