



# PUNCTUATION

## Use this sheet to help you:

- use commas, semi-colons, colons, dashes, quotation marks, parentheses, hyphens and capitalisation

## 5 minute self test

*Which of these letters would you prefer to receive?*

<p>Dear John, I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy--will you let me be yours? Gloria</p>	<p>Dear John, I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men, I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be? Yours, Gloria</p>
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***Punctuate and capitalise the following text:***

lars kolind head of the danish company oticon holdind a/s emphasises that making hearing aids is not the core of what his company is about its about something more fundamental he says its about the way people perceive work at orican there are no organisation charts no departments no functions no titles and not permanent desks any vestiges of an organisational hierarchy have disappeared (Daft and Samson, 2003, p.57)

***Check your answers on Page 5***



## Introduction

### Read the following:

*Because the economy of each country is becoming a close relationship and every country need depend on some aspect of the economy in other country more or less every country needs these people who have the experience of studying overseas in order to develop the business with other countries. (Actual student example)*

Grammar is not the only problem here! The lack of punctuation is likely to cause great strain for the reader and lower marks for the student.

Inability to use punctuation can make work unclear and can change the meaning of a sentence. For examples of how punctuation affects meaning, refer again to the letters on Page 1 or read the sentences below:

- Charles the first King walked and talked five minutes after his head was cut off. (*How can he walk and talk without a head?*)
- Charles the first King walked and talked. Five minutes after, his head was cut off. (*Better.*)

Even if you feel confident about some of the areas of punctuation described below, you might find a short review of this Helpsheet useful. Punctuation can be tricky!

## The comma (,)

The comma is possibly the most misused form of punctuation.

### Main uses

1. Between introductory words or phrases and the subject  
*To start with, I shall discuss HRM.*  
*Thirdly, the issue of company finances needs to be considered.*
2. To separate main clauses in some sentences  
*The manager wanted to find a solution, but there was no solution in sight.*
3. For sentences which show symmetrical contrast  
*The greater the cost, the higher the risk.*
4. To separate items in lists  
*The meeting was attended by the General Manager, the Supervisor, the Building Attendant, and others.*
5. To make meaning clear  
*The thesis was the first one on Adam Smith which I read, to my great profit.*  
Compare: *The thesis was the first one on Adam Smith, which I read to my great profit.*
6. As a replacement for parentheses  
*The company was forced, by its declining share value, to buy-back their shares at a loss.*



## The semicolon (;)

### Main uses

1. To link independent clauses that contain closely related ideas.  
*Some people write with a word processor; other people write with a pen or pencil.*
2. To separate items in a list or series if any of the items contain commas  
*Members of the board include Jim Johnson, President; Tony Allen, Vice-President; and Lee Jefferson, Department Manager.*
3. Before connector words such as *however*, *nevertheless*, *moreover*, as a consequence and *in fact*. Note these words are then followed by a comma.  
*The possibilities are great; however, the risks are substantial.*

## The colon (:)

### Main uses

1. To add one or more directly related ideas such as a series of directions, a list, a direct quotation or other comment illustrating or explaining the statement.  
*There are four levels within the company: the Board, Executive, Management and General Staff.*  
*The recommendations are as follows: firstly ...*  
*Jones responded to the suggestion by screaming: "It is not my turn!"*
2. Colons can also be used in business greetings (Dear Sir:), between the hour and minutes when stating time (5:30 a.m.), and between titles and subtitles in books or articles.

## Hyphens (-)

### Main uses

Hyphens are used for two main reasons: to "break" words when spacing lines, and to combine words when separating them would be misleading.

1. If you must break words at the end of a line, observe the following rules:
  - Don't break words of a single syllable
  - Break already hyphenated words at the hyphen
  - Break in the middle, never the start or end of a word
  - Use "natural" breaks: micro-economics, econo-metrics, etc.
2. Use hyphens when the meaning is unclear without them. Compare: reform and re-form; recreation and re-creation. Don't hyphenate if the meaning is clear without them.



## The dash (—)

### Main Uses

To emphasize a point, or, like parentheses, to set off a disconnected expression or element. Comments set off with a pair of dashes appear more relevant to the main sentence than do comments in parentheses. If you want to add something that is less relevant—and could really be omitted—use parentheses (...) not dashes. Compare:

*It is important for students—especially undergraduate students—to know how to write clearly.*

*The CEO of the company (with the largest income) who was usually involved in all company events, did not want to attend the meeting.*

Note that a dash (—) is not the same—and does not look the same—as a hyphen (-) (See “Hyphens” below). The former is a longer line achieved by typing two hyphens and then hitting the “enter” key. If you cannot obtain the correct form, it is acceptable to use two *hyphens* to indicate a dash (--).

## Inverted commas/quotation marks (“...”)

### Main uses

To enclose direct quotes, to set off words being used in a special sense, and to indicate parts of larger works, such as titles of essays, articles and book chapters.

*Joseph Heller coined the term “Catch-22”.*

*We recently read C. Yates’ article “Economics”.*

For quotes within quotes use single inverted commas:

*“He said: ‘Finish’ before the exam began”.*

In some texts, single inverted commas are used for direct quotes and double are used for quotes within quotes. Both are acceptable but be consistent in usage.

## Parentheses ( )

### Main uses

Use sparingly to include non-essential material in sentences such as dates, sources, or disconnected ideas. If the material is considered relevant to the sentence, but not directly relevant, use dashes.

*After 50 years of service, the CEO (who is 87 years old) retired.*

*According to Jones, ‘...’ (Jones, 1998, p. 54).*



## Capitalisation

### Main uses

Capitalisation causes enormous confusion. Many students use capitals indiscriminately. But the rules are simple.

1. The first letters of titles are always capitalized.  
*Computer Crime: A Study of Security Systems and Technology*  
*The Journal of Marketing*
2. The first letters of qualifications are always capitalized.  
*Diploma of Education*  
*Master of Commerce*
3. The first letters of individual titles are capitalized.  
*Mr, Ms, Mrs, Dr, Professor, Reverend, Prime Minister, President, Governor General*
4. The first letters of institutions are always capitalized.  
*The University of Melbourne*  
*Monash University*
5. A sentence within another sentence begins with a capital.  
*She turned to him and said: 'Go away!'*
6. The first letter of a country, state, province or territory is capitalized.  
*Victoria, South Australia, Northern Territory, the United States of America*
7. The first letters of a company are capitalized.  
*Microsoft, Ford Motor Company*
8. The first letters of directions words are capitalized.  
*South-East, North-West, Northern Queensland, the Far-East.*
9. The first letters of proper names are capitalized.  
*John Smith, Richard Harris, David Dickson*
10. Periods of history are also capitalized.  
*The Age of Reason*  
*The Baroque Period*

### Exceptions

Capitals are NOT used in sentences where a title, organization or a company is not being identified as such:

*I am studying at university.*  
*I am studying at the University of Melbourne.*

*The wind came from the south-east.*  
*He lives in South-East Asia.*

*A professor of economics said ...*  
*Professor of Economics, John Smith said ...*

Prepositions and conjunctions should not be capitalized.



## Answers

### 5 minute self test

Lars Kolind, head of the Danish company Oticon Holdind A/S emphasises that making hearing aids is not the core of what his company is about. 'It's about something more fundamental', he says. 'It's about the way people perceive work.' At Orican, there are no organisation charts, no departments, no functions, no titles and not permanent desks. Any vestiges of an organisational hierarchy have disappeared. (Daft and Samson, 2003, p.57)

## References

- Daft, R. L., Samson, D. (2003). *Management*, Fifth Edition, Melbourne, Australia, Thomson TLU (n.d.). *Good Writing*. Second Edition. Faculty of Economics and Commerce, University of Melbourne.
- Murray-Smith, S. (1990). *Right Words*, Melbourne, Australia, Penguin Books
- Nordquist, R. (2007). About.com: Grammar and Punctuation, *Punctuation Matters: A "Dear John" Letter and a Two Million Dollar Comma*, Accessed 24.4.08 from, <http://grammar.about.com/od/punctuationandmechanics/a/punctmatters07.htm> ,