

PUNCTUATION "RULES OF THUMB"

The guidelines in the quiz below are just that: guidelines. If you just want something easy to remember, or a quick reference page, keep this close to hand.

Bear in mind also, that language evolves continuously - what was not acceptable a decade ago, may be today.

* Note that an example of each punctuation mark is cunningly woven into the explanatory notes below.

1. The COMMA ,		
	You can add a comma where you might pause to breathe if you were reading out loud. When you are creating a list of items, separate them with commas, otherwise the reading can become tedious.	
WHICH IS CORRECT?	a) As I was running up the stairs I had to stop, to catch my breath	
	b) As I was running, up the stairs I had to stop to catch my breath.	
	c) As I was running up the stairs, I had to stop to catch my breath.	

2. The SEMI-COLON ;		
	Semi-colons are <i>almost</i> interchangeable with full stops. The first letter of the next word would be lower case though, and you wouldn't start a new paragraph after it. Often, the phrase after the semi-colon is related to the one before it; however, if you really aren't sure, just don't use it at all.	
WHICH IS CORRECT?	a) A day in the office can be stressful; it can depend on a number of things.	
	b) A day in the office can be stressful; It can depend on a number of things.	
	c) A day in the office can be stressful; and it can depend on a number of things.	

3. The COLON :		
	The colon usually introduces something: it could be a new subject or it could be a list	
WHICH ARE CORRECT? (choose 2)	a) I have an idea, let's go camping: next year.	
	b) I have an idea: let's go camping next year.	
	c) Ways to raise money: you could sell your car, you could get a bank loan, or you could do some overtime.	
	d) Ways to raise money, you could sell your car: you could get a bank loan: you could do some overtime.	

4. The HYPHEN or DASH -		
	A hyphen or a dash can either join words together or keep them well apart. For example <i>top-notch</i> . But the hyphen is gradually disappearing from English, for example e-mail is now more often <i>email</i> ; bedroom used to be written as <i>bed-room</i> . As a dash, to separate words or ideas, it can often replace parentheses (sometimes known as brackets)	
WHICH IS CORRECT?	a) I love fish-and-chips	
	b) We often have take-away at the week-end	
	c) We have takeaway - if we can afford it - on Friday nights	

5. The APOSTROPHE '

	The apostrophe's use is mainly to denote possession, as at the start of this sentence, or omission, as in the missing 'o' in the next sentence. They aren't ever used to denote plural (<i>but there are those who argue!</i>)	
WHICH ARE CORRECT? (choose 2)	a) Frankie's shoes did not get wet	
	b) Frankies shoe's did not get wet	
	c) Frankie's shoes didn't get wet	
	d) Frankie's shoes did'nt get wet	

6. UPPER or LOWER case?

	Upper case - proper nouns (names like David, or Buckingham Palace) start with an upper case letter, but ordinary nouns (things, like 'a palace' or 'a cat') don't.	
WHICH ARE CORRECT? (choose 2)	a) David and Victoria are often seen at Highgrove Manor	X
	b) David and Victoria are often seen at highgrove manor	
	c) There is a manor at the end of the drive, but beware of the Corgis	X
	d) There is a Manor at the end of the drive, but beware of the Dogs	

7. ELLIPSIS (singular) ...

	<p>Ellipses (plural)... can be used to show hesitation in speech, a missing word, a trailing off of speech.</p> <p>There are a number of styles, usually with 3 dots, sometimes with a space either side or none at all. Once you decide... just be consistent.</p>	
ANY OF THESE CAN BE CORRECT	a) There was something spooky about the old house...	
	b) There was something... spooky about the old house.	
	c) What... what's inside the house?	
	d) What on earth...?	

And one more thing:

8. EMPHASIS

	<p>This is the importance, or the stress that you add to a word to give it a specific meaning.</p> <p>It's very hard to convey in writing, but you will see what can happen in SPEECH when you look at the following phrase.</p> <p>It looks exactly the same 9 times - but if you raise your voice when you say the word in RED, it will give a subtly different meaning. Try it out, it's fun!</p> <p>* Take a lesson from this when you are sending texts or social media messages, as this is when you do not have the benefit of facial expression or tone of voice to soften or emphasise your intended meaning.</p>	
	a) I didn't say she stole my red bag yesterday	...but someone else may have
	b) I didn't say she stole my red bag yesterday	fierce denial
	c) I didn't say she stole my red bag yesterday	...but I might have thought it

	d) I didn't say she stole my red bag yesterday	I said someone else did
	e) I didn't say she stole my red bag yesterday	I meant she took it, or borrowed it
	f) I didn't say she stole my red bag yesterday	it was someone else's bag
	g) I didn't say she stole my red bag yesterday	it was bag of another colour
	h) I didn't say she stole my red bag yesterday	she stole something else that is red
	i) I didn't say she stole my red bag yesterday	it might have been a different day

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ANSWERS	
1. The COMMA	c) As I was running up the stairs, I had to stop to catch my breath.
2. The SEMI-COLON	a) A day in the office can be stressful; it can depend on a number of things.
3. The COLON	b) I have an idea: let's go camping next year. c) Ways to raise money: you could sell your car, you could get a bank loan, or you could do some overtime.
4. The HYPHEN or DASH	d) We have takeaway - if we can afford it - on Friday nights
5. The APOSTROPHE	a) Frankie's shoes did not get wet c) Frankie's shoes didn't get wet
6. UPPER or lower CASE?	a) David and Victoria are often seen at Highgrove Manor c) There is a manor at the end of the drive, but beware of the Corgis
7. ELLIPSES	a), b), c) and d) are all acceptable, BUT don't over-use them or they lose their effectiveness