

CHAPTER 32

Other Punctuation Marks

This chapter covers the colon (below), the dash (p. 480), parentheses (p. 482), brackets (p. 483), the ellipsis mark (p. 484), and the slash (p. 487).

Note Many grammar and style checkers will flag a lone parenthesis or bracket so that you can match it with another parenthesis or bracket. But most checkers cannot recognize other misuses of the marks covered here and instead simply ignore the marks.

32a Use the colon to introduce and to separate.

The colon is mainly a mark of introduction: it signals that the words following will explain or amplify. The colon also has several conventional uses, such as in expressions of time.

In its main use as an introducer, a colon is *always* preceded by a complete **main clause**—one containing a subject and a predicate and not starting with a subordinating word (see p. 252 for more on main clauses). A colon may or may not be followed by a main clause. This is one way the colon differs from the semicolon (see the box on the next page). The colon is interchangeable with the dash, though the dash is more informal and more abrupt (see p. 480).

Note Don't use a colon more than once in a sentence. The sentence should end with the element introduced by the colon.

1 Use a colon to introduce a concluding explanation, series, appositive, or long or formal quotation.

Depending on your preference, a complete sentence *after* the colon may begin with a capital letter or a small letter. Just be consistent throughout an essay.

Explanation

Soul food is a varied cuisine: it includes spicy gumbos, black-eyed peas, and collard greens.

Soul food has a deceptively simple definition: African American ethnic cooking.

Sometimes a concluding explanation is preceded by *the following* or *as follows* and a colon:

A more precise definition might be the following: ingredients, cooking methods, and dishes originating in Africa, brought to the New World by black slaves, and modified or supplemented in the Caribbean and the American South.

Series (p. 441)

At least three soul food dishes are familiar to most Americans: fried chicken, barbecued spareribs, and sweet potato pie.

Appositive (p. 257)

Soul food has one disadvantage: fat.

Certain expressions commonly introduce appositives, such as *namely* and *that is*. These expressions should *follow* the colon: *Soul food has one disadvantage: namely, fat.*

Long or formal quotation

The comma generally separates a signal phrase from a quotation (see p. 444). But when you introduce a long or formal quotation with a complete sentence, use a colon instead:

Unfinished thought

If the book had a plot—but a plot would be conventional.

Hesitation in dialog

“I was worried you might think I had stayed away because I was influenced by—” He stopped and lowered his eyes.

Astonished, Howe said, “Influenced by what?”

“Well, by—” Blackburn hesitated and for an answer pointed to the table.—Lionel Trilling

2 Use a dash or dashes to emphasize nonessential elements.

Dashes may be used in place of commas or parentheses to set off and emphasize nonessential elements. (See the box on the facing page.) Dashes are especially useful when these elements are internally punctuated. Be sure to use a pair of dashes when the element interrupts a main clause.

Appositive (p. 257)

The qualities Monet painted—bright sunlight, rich shadows, deep colors—abounded near the rivers and gardens he used as subjects.

Modifier

Though they are close together—separated by only a few blocks—the two neighborhoods could be in different countries.

Parenthetical expression (p. 482)

At any given time there exists an inventory of undiscovered embezzlement in—or more precisely not in—the country’s businesses and banks. —John Kenneth Galbraith

3 Use a dash to set off introductory series and concluding series and explanations.

Introductory series

Shortness of breath, skin discoloration or the sudden appearance of moles, persistent indigestion, the presence of small lumps—all these may signify cancer.

A dash sets off concluding series and explanations more informally and more abruptly than a colon does (see p. 478):

Concluding series

The patient undergoes a battery of tests—CAT scan, bronchoscopy, perhaps even biopsy.

Concluding explanation

Many patients are disturbed by the CAT scan—by the need to keep still for long periods in an exceedingly small space.

4 Use the dash only where needed.

Don’t use the dash when commas, semicolons, and periods are more appropriate. And don’t use too many dashes. They can create a jumpy or breathy quality in writing.

Not In all his life—eighty-seven years—my great-grandfather never allowed his picture to be taken—not even once. He claimed the “black box”—the camera—would steal his soul.

But In all his eighty-seven years my great-grandfather did not allow his picture to be taken even once. He claimed the “black box”—the camera—would steal his soul.

EXERCISE 32.2 Revising: Dashes

Insert dashes as needed in the following sentences. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Example:

What would we do if someone like Adolf Hitler that monster appeared among us?

What would we do if someone like Adolf Hitler—that monster—appeared among us?

1. The movie-theater business is undergoing dramatic changes that may affect what movies are made and shown.
2. The closing of independent theaters, the control of theaters by fewer and fewer owners, and the increasing ownership of theaters by movie studios and distributors these changes may reduce the availability of noncommercial films.
3. Yet at the same time the number of movie screens is increasing primarily in multiscreen complexes so that smaller films may find more outlets.
4. The number of active movie screens that is, screens showing films or booked to do so is higher now than at any time since World War II.
5. The biggest theater complexes seem to be something else as well art galleries, amusement arcades, restaurants, spectacles.

32 Use parentheses to enclose parenthetical expressions and labels for lists within sentences.

Parentheses *always* come in pairs: one before and one after the punctuated material.

1 Use parentheses to enclose parenthetical expressions.

Parenthetical expressions include explanations, digressions, and examples that may be helpful or interesting but are not essential to meaning. They are emphasized least when set off with a pair of parentheses instead of commas or dashes. (See the box on p. 481.)

The population of Philadelphia (now about 1.5 million) has declined since 1950.

Ariel (published in 1965) contains Sylvia Plath's last poems.

Note Don't put a comma before a parenthetical expression enclosed in parentheses:

Not Philadelphia's population compares with Houston's, (just over 1.6 million).

But Philadelphia's population compares with Houston's (just over 1.6 million).

A comma, semicolon, or period falling after a parenthetical expression should be placed *outside* the closing parenthesis:

Philadelphia has a larger African American population (nearly 40 per-cent), while Houston has a larger Latino population (nearly 28 percent).

When it falls between other complete sentences, a complete sentence enclosed in parentheses has a capital letter and end punctuation:

In general, coaches will tell you that scouts are just guys who can't coach. (But then, so are brain surgeons.)

—Roy Blount

2 Use parentheses to enclose labels for lists within sentences.

Outside the Middle East, the countries with the largest oil reserves are (1) Venezuela (63 billion barrels), (2) Russia (57 billion barrels), and (3) Mexico (51 billion barrels).

When you set a list off from your text, do not enclose such labels in parentheses.

EXERCISE 32.3 Revising: Parentheses

Insert parentheses as needed in the following sentences. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Example:

Students can find good-quality, inexpensive furniture for exam-ple, desks, tables, chairs, sofas, even beds in junk stores.

Students can find good-quality, inexpensive furniture (for example, desks, tables, chairs, sofas, even beds) in junk stores.

1. Many of those involved in the movie business agree that multiscreen complexes are good for two reasons: 1 they cut the costs of exhibitors, and 2 they offer more choices to audiences.

2. Those who produce and distribute films and not just the big studios argue that the multiscreen theaters give exhibitors too much power.
3. The major studios are buying movie theaters to gain control over important parts of the distribution process what gets shown and for how much money.
4. For twelve years 1938–50 the federal government forced the studios to sell all their movie theaters.
5. But because they now have more competition television and DVD players, for instance, the studios are permitted to own theaters.

32d Use brackets within quotations to indicate your own comments or changes.

Brackets have specialized uses in mathematical equations, but their main use for all kinds of writing is to indicate that you have altered a quotation. If you need to explain, clarify, or correct the words of the writer you quote, place your additions in a pair of brackets:

“That Texaco station [just outside Chicago] is one of the busiest in the nation,” said a company spokesperson.

Use brackets if you need to alter the capitalization of a quotation so that it will fit into your sentence. (See also p. 491.)

”[O]ne of the busiest in the nation” is how a company spokesperson described the station.

You may also use a bracketed word or words to substitute for parts of a quotation that would otherwise be unclear. In the following sentence, the bracketed word substitutes for *they* in the original:

“Despite considerable achievements in other areas, [humans] still cannot control the weather and probably will never be able to do so.”

See pages 624–25 for additional examples of using brackets with quotations.

The word *sic* (Latin for “in this manner”) in brackets indicates that an error in the quotation appeared in the original and was not made by you. When following MLA style, do not underline or italicize *sic* in brackets. Most other styles—including Chicago, APA, and CSE—do italicize *sic*.

According to the newspaper report, “The car slammed thru [sic] the railing and into oncoming traffic.”

Don’t use *sic* to make fun of a writer or to note errors in a passage that is clearly nonstandard or illiterate.

Note Always acknowledge the sources of quotations in order to avoid plagiarism. (See pp. 633–34 and 637–38.)

32e Use the ellipsis mark to indicate omissions from quotations and pauses in speech.

The **ellipsis mark** consists of three spaced periods (. . .). It usually indicates an omission from a quotation, although it may also show an interruption in dialog.

Note Additional issues with quotations are discussed elsewhere in this book:

- v **Integrating source material into your text**, pages 623–28.
- v **Acknowledging the sources of quotations to avoid plagiarism**, pages 633–34 and 637–38. See also example 3 on the facing page.

1 The ellipsis mark substitutes for omissions from quotations.

When you omit a part of a quotation, show the omission with an ellipsis mark. All the following examples quote from the passage below about environmentalism.

Original quotation

“At the heart of the environmentalist world view is the conviction that human physical and spiritual health depends on sustaining the planet in a relatively unaltered state. Earth is our home in the full, genetic sense, where humanity and its ancestors existed for all the millions of years of their evolution. Natural ecosystems—forests, coral reefs, marine blue waters—maintain the world exactly as we would wish it to be maintained. When we debase the global environment and extinguish the variety of life, we are dismantling a support system that is too complex to understand, let alone replace, in the foreseeable future.”
—Edward O. Wilson, “Is Humanity Suicidal?”

1. Omission of the middle of a sentence

“Natural ecosystems . . . maintain the world exactly as we would wish it to be maintained.”

2. Omission of the end of a sentence, without source citation

“Earth is our home. . . .” [The sentence period, closed up to the last word, precedes the ellipsis mark.]

3. Omission of the end of a sentence, with source citation

“Earth is our home . . .” (Wilson 27). [The sentence period follows the source citation.]

4. Omission of parts of two or more sentences

Wilson writes, “At the heart of the environmentalist world view is the conviction that human physical and spiritual health depends on sustaining the planet . . . where humanity and its ancestors existed for all the millions of years of their evolution.”

5. Omission of one or more sentences

As Wilson puts it, “At the heart of the environmentalist world view is the conviction that human physical and spiritual health depends on sustaining the planet in a relatively unaltered state. . . . When we debase the global environment and extinguish the variety of life, we are dismantling a support system that is too complex to understand, let alone replace, in the foreseeable future.”

6. Omission from the middle of a sentence through the end of another sentence

“Earth is our home. . . . When we debase the global environment and extinguish the variety of life, we are dismantling a support system that is too complex to understand, let alone replace, in the foreseeable future.”

7. Omission of the beginning of a sentence, leaving a complete sentence

a. Bracketed capital letter

“[H]uman physical and spiritual health,” Wilson writes, “depends on sustaining the planet in a relatively unaltered state.” [No ellipsis mark is needed because the brackets around the *H* indicate that the letter was not capitalized originally and thus that the beginning of the sentence has been omitted.]

b. Small letter

According to Wilson, “human physical and spiritual health depends on sustaining the planet in a relatively unaltered state.” [No ellipsis mark is needed because the small *h* indicates that the beginning of the sentence has been omitted.]

c. Capital letter from the original

Hami comments, “. . . Wilson argues eloquently for the environmentalist world view.” [An ellipsis mark is needed because the quoted part of the sentence begins with a capital letter and it is not clear that the beginning of the original sentence has been omitted.]

8. Use of a word or phrase

Wilson describes the earth as “our home.” [No ellipsis mark needed.]

Note the following features of the examples:

- ✓ **Use an ellipsis mark when it is not otherwise clear that you have left out material from the source**, as when you omit one or more sentences (examples 5 and 6) or when the words you quote form a complete sentence that is different in the original (examples 1–4 and 7c).

- ✓ **You don't need an ellipsis mark when it is obvious that you have omitted something**, such as when capitalization indicates omission (examples 7a and 7b) or when a phrase clearly comes from a larger sentence (example 8).
- ✓ **Place an ellipsis mark after a sentence period *except* when a parenthetical source citation follows the quotation**, as in example 3. Then the sentence period falls after the citation.

If you omit one or more lines of poetry or paragraphs of prose from a quotation, use a separate line of ellipsis marks across the full width of the quotation to show the omission:

In "Song: Love Armed" from 1676, Aphra Behn contrasts two lovers' experiences of a romance:

Love in fantastic triumph sate,
 Whilst bleeding hearts around him flowed,

 But my poor heart alone is harmed,
 Whilst thine the victor is, and free. (lines 1-2, 15-16)

(See pp. 688–89 for the format of displayed quotations like this one. And see p. 653 on the source-citation form illustrated here.)

2 The ellipsis mark indicates pauses or unfinished statements.

When writing dialog or when writing informally (not in academic writing), you can show hesitation or interruption with an ellipsis mark instead of a dash (p. 480).

"I wish . . ." His voice trailed off.

EXERCISE 32.4 Using ellipsis marks

Use ellipsis marks and any other needed punctuation to follow the num-bered instructions for quoting from the following paragraph. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

WOMEN IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES WERE EDUCATED IN THE HOME AND, IN SOME CASES, IN BOARDING SCHOOLS. MEN WERE EDUCATED AT HOME, IN GRAMMAR SCHOOLS, AND AT THE UNIVERSITIES. THE UNIVERSITIES WERE CLOSED TO FEMALE STUDENTS. FOR WOMEN, "LEARNING THE BIBLE," AS ELIZABETH JOCELINE PUTS IT, WAS AN IMPETUS TO LEARNING TO READ. TO BE ABLE TO READ THE BIBLE IN THE VERNACULAR WAS A LIBERATING EXPERIENCE THAT FREED THE READER FROM HEARING ONLY THE SET PASSAGES READ IN THE CHURCH AND INTERPRETED BY THE CHURCH. A PROTESTANT WOMAN WAS EXPECTED TO READ THE SCRIPTURES DAILY, TO MEDITATE ON THEM, AND TO MEMORIZE PORTIONS OF THEM. IN ADDITION, A WOMAN WAS EXPECTED TO INSTRUCT HER ENTIRE HOUSEHOLD IN "LEARNING THE BIBLE" BY HOLDING INSTRUCTIONAL AND DEVOTIONAL TIMES EACH DAY FOR ALL HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS, INCLUDING THE SERVANTS.

—Charlotte F. Otten, *English Women's Voices, 1540–1700*

1. Quote the fifth sentence, but omit everything from *that freed the reader* to the end.
2. Quote the fifth sentence, but omit the words *was a liberating experience that*.
3. Quote the first and sixth sentences.

32f Use the slash between options, between lines of poetry, and in electronic addresses.

Option

I don't know why some teachers oppose pass/fail courses.

Between options, the slash is not surrounded by extra space.

Note The options *and/or* and *he/she* should be avoided. (See the Glossary of Usage, pp. 865 and 872.)

Poetry

Many readers have sensed a reluctant turn away from death in Frost's lines "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, / But I have promises to keep" (13–14).

When you run lines of poetry into your text, separate them with a slash surrounded by space.
(See pp. 688–89 for more on quoting poetry.)

Electronic address

<http://www.stanford.edu/depts/spc/spc.html>

EXERCISE 32.5 Revising: Colons, dashes, parentheses, brackets, ellipsis marks, slashes

Insert colons, dashes, parentheses, brackets, ellipsis marks, or slashes as needed in the following paragraph. When different marks would be appropriate in the same place, be able to defend the choice you make. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

“Let all the learned say what they can, ’Tis ready money makes the man.” These two lines of poetry by the Englishman William Somerville 1645–1742 may apply to a current American economic problem. Non-American investors with “ready money” pour some of it as much as \$1.3 trillion in recent years into the United States. The investments of foreigners are varied stocks and bonds, savings deposits, service companies, factories, art works, even the campaigns of political candidates. Proponents of foreign investment argue that it revives industry, strengthens the economy, creates jobs more than 3 million, they say, and encourages free trade among nations. Opponents discuss the risks of heavy foreign investment it makes the American economy vulnerable to outsiders, sucks profits from the country, and gives foreigners an influence in governmental decision making. On both sides, it seems, “the learned say ’Tis ready money makes the man or country.” The question is, whose money?

EXERCISE ON CHAPTERS 27–32 Revising: Punctuation

The following paragraphs are unpunctuated except for end-of-sentence periods. Insert periods, commas, semicolons, apostrophes, quotation marks, colons, dashes, or parentheses where they are required. When different marks would be appropriate in the same place, be able to defend the choice you make. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Brewed coffee is the most widely consumed beverage in the world. The trade in coffee beans alone amounts to well over \$6000000000 a year and the total volume of beans traded exceeds 4250000 tons a year. Its believed that the beverage was introduced into Arabia in the fifteenth century AD probably by Ethiopians. By the middle or late sixteenth century the Arabs had introduced the beverage to the Europeans who at first resisted it because of its strong flavor and effect as a mild stimulant. The French Italians and other Europeans incorporated coffee into their diets by the seventeenth century the English however preferred tea which they were then importing from India. Since America was colonized primarily by the English Americans also preferred tea. Only after the Boston Tea Party 1773 did Americans begin drinking coffee in large quantities. Now though the US is one of the top coffee-consuming countries consumption having been spurred on by familiar advertising claims Good till the last drop Rich hearty aroma Always rich never bitter.

Produced from the fruit of an evergreen tree coffee is grown primarily in Latin America southern Asia and Africa. Coffee trees require a hot climate high humidity rich soil with good drainage and partial shade consequently they thrive on the east or west slopes of tropical volcanic mountains where the soil is laced with potash and drains easily. The coffee beans actually seeds grow inside bright red berries. The berries are picked by hand and the beans are extracted by machine leaving a pulpy fruit residue that can be used for fertilizer. The beans are usually roasted in ovens a chemical process that releases the beans essential oil caffeol which gives coffee its distinctive aroma. Over a hundred different varieties of beans are produced in the world each with a different flavor attributable to three factors the species of plant *Coffea arabica* and *Coffea robusta* are the most common and the soil and climate where the variety was grown.

<http://www.ablongman.com/littlebrown>

Visit the companion Web site for more help and additional exercises on the colon, the dash, parentheses, brackets, the ellipsis mark, and the slash.

Distinguishing the colon and the semicolon

- v **The colon is a mark of introduction that separates elements of *unequal* importance**, such as statements and explanations or introductions and quotations. The first element must be a complete main clause; the second element need not be. (See below.)

The business school caters to working students: it offers special evening courses in business writing, finance, and management.

The school has one goal: to train students to be responsible, competent businesspeople.

- v **The semicolon separates elements of *equal* importance**, almost always complete main clauses. (See p. 452.)

Few enrolling students know exactly what they want from the school; most hope generally for a managerial career.

Distinguishing dashes, commas, and parentheses

Dashes, commas, and parentheses may all set off nonessential elements.

- v **Dashes give the information the greatest emphasis** (facing page):

Many students—including some employed by the college—disapprove of the new work rules.

- v **Commas are less emphatic** (p. 435):

Many students, including some employed by the college, disapprove of the new work rules.

- v **Parentheses are the least emphatic**, signaling that the information is just worth a mention (next page):

Many students (including some employed by the college) disapprove of the new work rules.