

Punctuation

Dash - Appositives:

Note the difference between a dash — (M dash) and a hyphen - (N Dash).

A dash may be used to set off a long appositive phrase, especially if it contains commas:

The exhausted woman—makeup smeared, curlers drooping from her hair, and wearing a robe and slippers—opened the door to find her boyfriend standing in the hallway.

Dash - Change in Sentence:

Use a dash to denote an abrupt change or break in a sentence:

The beach was covered with girls in swimsuits—I mean hundreds of girls—all of whom were enjoying the warm summer sun.

If the break occurs at the end of the sentence, no period is needed after the dash:

"If you don't get back to work, I'll—" He did not complete the thought.

Dash - Emphasis or Reiteration:

Use a dash to emphasize or reiterate a point, normally at the end of a sentence:

Most modern Hollywood films are poorly plotted—and far too violent.

The Industrial Revolution will seem to be a mere footnote on the pages of history as the electronic age permeates our lives—indeed, every facet of our lives.

Dash - Explanation:

Use dashes to set off an essential explanation that interrupts the sentence:

So distracted by the noise from a neighboring house—a group of teenagers were playing loud music—he abandoned his efforts to finish his homework.

Dash - Series:

A dash can be used to set off items in a series that precede the main clause:

Books, sleeping bags, mosquito netting, food—these are some of the things you will need at summer camp.

Replace the word "to" or "through" with a dash in referring to dates, pages, series, etc.:

1978—1989

Pages 14—47

A—Z, 1—100

Ellipsis - Omission:

Use the ellipsis, three consecutive periods separated by spaces(. . .), to mark the location of an omitted word or phrase. The ellipsis is used in quoted matter to eliminate words that are not central to the point being made:

that "The true test of civilization is. . . the kind of man
the country turns out."
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

If words are eliminated at the end of a sentence, use four consecutive periods separated by spaces (. . . .):

"Absolute governments (though the disgrace of human nature) have this advantage with them, they are simple. . . ."

(Thomas Paine, from "Common Sense")

If a paragraph or more is omitted, place a line of spaced periods (long ellipsis) between the blocks of text remaining — usually 5 periods.

Do not, however, attempt to allow the ellipsis to make your point for you.

Ellipsis — Pause

The ellipsis may be used to create a long pause for thought.

growth. . . Education is a social process. . . Education is
Education is, not a preparation for life; education is

life itself.

(John Dewey)

This is especially useful in dialogue.

The witness answered, "They sped away in a . . . Chevy. . .

yes, it was a Chevy."

Exclamation Point - Command:

NOTE: In all cases, use the exclamation point sparingly to avoid neutralizing its impact!!

Use the exclamation point at the end of a command:

Get out!

Abandon ship!

Exclamation Point - Dissent:

Use the exclamation point to denote strong dissent:

I quite disagree!

He certainly did not!

Exclamation Point - Emphasis:

Use the exclamation point to denote an emphatic word or sentence:

So! You've done it again!

I can't believe you could be so stupid!

You're never going to learn!

Exclamation Point - Sarcasm or Irony:

An exclamation point may be placed between parentheses to denote sarcasm or irony:

The film illustrated such exciting (!) subjects as cross-pollination and pruning.

Exclamation Point - Surprise:

Use the exclamation point to denote surprise:

My God! Helen! It's really you!

What in the world is that!

NOTE: In the second example, the exclamation point is still the appropriate punctuation mark, even after an apparent question, since the expression is emphatic.

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