

# Punctuation

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As a rule, RAND documents conform to standard U.S. conventions of punctuation. The exception is quoted material, which should match the original. The following subsections summarize the standards, explain frequently misunderstood points, and clarify RAND positions on disputed issues.

## STANDARD PUNCTUATION

### Period

Periods end three types of sentences:

- Declarative sentences  
The meeting is at 9:30.
- Imperative sentences  
Count the pages carefully.
- Indirect questions  
He wanted to know how the new system works.

For other uses of periods, see Chapters Four and Five.

### Question Mark

Question marks normally follow *direct* questions.

When did you get here?

A secondary use is to express doubt about a piece of information, by following that information with a question mark enclosed in parentheses.

by 1955(?)

It is, however, preferable to be clearer. In this case,

by about 1955

would be better.

Periods, commas, and most other forms of punctuation should not follow a question mark, but quotation marks and parentheses may, under certain circumstances. When the question mark applies only to the material enclosed within the quotation marks or the parentheses, the question mark goes inside as well.

The third question was, “How long have you lived at this address?”

When the question applies to the sentence as a whole, the question mark falls outside the other punctuation.

Can you suggest an alternative to Eq. (2.4)?

### Exclamation Point

An exclamation point indicates surprise, disbelief, or strong emotion. It is almost always inappropriate in RAND publications—the obvious exception being in direct quotations.

### Comma

Commas have a variety of uses. To “set off” a word or phrase, one comma precedes the phrase and one comma follows it. If, however, the phrase falls at the beginning or end of a sentence, only one comma is needed. The following rules reflect standard American usage:

Commas separate main clauses linked by *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*.

He went inside, and he closed the door.

Commas separate items (including phrases) and coordinate adjectives in a series. Note the use of the comma prior to *and* and *or*.

He could only interview Mrs. Wood, Dr. Stone, or Mr. Sullivan.

The dog was short, thin, and black.

Except in the cases above, commas do not precede coordinating conjunctions.

We followed the instructions but still failed to assemble the new bicycle.

Michael was unhappy with the test results and resolved to study harder “next time.”

Commas do not follow coordinating conjunctions (such as *and*) except to begin a parenthetical remark.

The judge listened attentively and rendered a carefully considered verdict.

The judge listened attentively and, we believe, rendered a carefully considered verdict.

Commas also do not follow coordinating conjunctions (such as *and*) that begin a sentence.

But the decision was wrong.

Commas do not precede the first item or follow the last item of a series, unless the entire series is parenthetical (and in that case, parentheses or dashes would be preferable).

California’s native conifers include *Sequoia sempervirens*, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, and *Pinus ponderosa*.

Some of our largest and most beautiful trees—the coast redwood, the giant sequoia, and the ponderosa pine—are protected from logging only in national and state parks.

Commas follow long introductory phrases—

In the estimation of most of the researchers, this method will work.

but not short ones.

So this project will have to be shelved until more data come in.

Commas follow introductory transitional expressions.

In fact, this research cannot be completed on time.

Commas set off nonrestrictive clauses and phrases (also called asides or parenthetical remarks).

Doug, who owns his own computer, often works at home.

Commas set off conjunctive adverbs when they fall between phrases or subordinate clauses.<sup>1</sup>

This job, however, requires more experience than the others.

Commas follow conjunctive adverbs that fall between two main clauses (note that a semicolon precedes the conjunctive adverb) or at the beginning of sentences.

We tried to call the client on Friday; however, he had already left.

However, we would like to recommend an alternative.

Commas set off contrasting ideas.

He reviewed the first draft, not the final version.

Commas set off elements of geographic names.

The mailing address is Washington, D.C., not Arlington, Virginia.

Commas set off elements of dates, as shown in the first example below. If a date consists only of month and year, however, there is no comma.<sup>2</sup>

The meeting took place on Thursday, March 27, 1992.

Badly needed rain fell during March 1992.

Commas set off nonrestrictive appositives, including abbreviations after names (Roman numerals after names, however, are not set off with commas).

Alexander Whitten, Jr., is the new dean of the graduate school.

The cables, great coiled snakes, littered the hangar floor.

John Wilson III will be our guest speaker.

Commas do not set off restrictive clauses and phrases. In the sentence below, the phrase “who use slide rules” specifies which engineers are behind the times. This phrase is “restrictive” because it refines the meaning of engineers to refer only to a specific subset of that group.

Engineers who use slide rules are behind the times.

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<sup>1</sup>A *conjunctive adverb* is an adverb used to relate or connect main clauses (which could be two separate sentences); a few examples are *accordingly*, *also*, *consequently*, *however*, *likewise*, *moreover*, *then*, *therefore*, and *thus*.

<sup>2</sup>If the day, month, year form is used, there is no comma: 27 March 1993.

Commas set off parenthetical remarks, such as inserted or appended expressions and remarks (several other marks serve a similar purpose; the comma is the least emphatic of the breaks).

He expects to complete the proofreading this week, with luck.

He thought that the ability to sing, of all musical forms, was truly innate to human beings.

Commas do not set off words and short phrases that are not parenthetical or that are only slightly so. Here, *perhaps* and *also* are only slightly parenthetical.

Perhaps a new approach is in order.

John also wants to attend.

Commas do not precede subordinating conjunctions (unless they begin a parenthetical remark).

We agreed with their conclusions only after we had spent several months independently checking their work.

## Semicolon

The semicolon separates main clauses not linked by *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, or *yet*.

He went inside; he closed the door.

The semicolon also separates items in a series that themselves contain commas.

The United States imports cobalt from the following nations: Zaire, 28 percent; Zambia, 25 percent; Canada, 20 percent; Norway, 13 percent; and other nations, 13 percent.

The semicolon precedes conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases that separate main clauses (such as *hence*, *however*, *therefore*, *in fact*, and *on the other hand*). Also note that a comma follows the adverb or phrase.

This process occurs quickly; hence, careful monitoring is necessary.

## Colon

A colon may direct attention to an explanation, summary, series, appositive, or quotation. Generally, the colon follows a complete sentence. It is also used to separate a title from a subtitle in a reference. To introduce a list, a colon may follow a clause that includes *the following* or *as follows*.

(See also Chapter Five for the use of colons in technical contexts.)

This is what he said: "I will not be able to do that."

He was like that: a wind in the trees.

*Pocket Pal: A Graphic Arts Production Handbook*

A colon may separate two main clauses or sentences when the second amplifies or explains the first (capitalize the word after the colon only when there are complete sentences on both sides of the colon).

The **scientific** value of even the most recent contributions to this literature, however, is seriously qualified: The sole witness to the dream is the dreamer himself (*Scientific American*).

Do not use a colon to separate a verb from its object (even a compound object, such as a list). In the next example, it would be incorrect to put a colon after *included*.

The meeting included Michael, Wade, Janet, and Blake.

## Dashes

The two types of dashes are distinguished from each other and from hyphens by their length, and each has a specific use:

- — em-dash
- – en-dash
- - hyphen.

The **em-dash** sets off introductory series and parenthetical elements for emphasis or clarity. Dashes do not simply substitute for commas, semicolons, or end punctuation.

This report—the last in the series—is due out in April.

The **en-dash** replaces the word *to*, generally for a range of numbers (such as page numbers, reference numbers, or dates).

pp. 23–35; David Hudson (1924–1989)

The en dash should *not*, however, be used to substitute for *to* following the word *from*, and it never replaces the word *and*.

from 1990 to 1993

between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

The en dash replaces the hyphen when one of the elements of a compound itself consists of two words or of a hyphenated word.

then–Vice President Mondale  
Los Angeles–Washington flight  
non-English–speaking students

Notice that there are no spaces on either side of dashes. If text is prepared on a typewriter or a word processor that cannot produce the different types of dashes, two hyphens may substitute for an em dash, and one hyphen may substitute for an en dash.

The **hyphen** is not actually a punctuation mark. It is used in forming some compound words (see Chapter Two) and in some types of numbers (see Chapter Five). It is most frequently used as a typographical element, as discussed in Appendix A.

### Parentheses and Other “Fences”

**Parentheses** set off parenthetical, supplementary, or illustrative matter. Whereas em dashes emphasize the material they set off, these fences indicate that the enclosed material is good to know, but less important than the surrounding text.

Commas and periods follow the closing parenthesis but do not precede the opening parenthesis. When an entire sentence is enclosed in parentheses, the end punctuation precedes the closing parenthesis. When the parenthetical matter is part of another sentence, the end punctuation follows the closing parenthesis.

Is this procedure safe? (Has it been thoroughly tested?)

We will discuss this in more detail later (see Section 3).

By definition, parenthetical text is associated with the material it follows. Thus, a parenthetical remark enclosed in parentheses and appearing in another sentence should never be preceded by any other punctuation. Phrase- or clause-ending punctuation should follow.

Because of the condition of the circuit (see Figure 5), we were unable to continue testing.

Brackets set off editorial annotations in quoted matter. One important use is with *sic*, which indicates that the error it follows appeared just that

way in the original; *sic* is only used with quoted material.

“He [Mr. Davis] agreed with most of the findings.”

The letter began, “Dear fiends [sic] and fellow citizens.”

Parenthetical material is sometimes nested. In the humanities and social sciences, brackets are generally used as the inner set of fences. Braces may also appear outermost if a third level is necessary (rare): {[ ( ) ]}.

This arrangement could easily change (for example, if the unit were reassigned to a Joint Task Force [JTF]).

In mathematics, however, parentheses are nested within brackets within braces (common in equations): {[ ( ) ]}. (Refer to Chapter Five for specific rules on the use of fences in equations.)

$$14 \times [(2+23) \times (4+18)] = 7,700$$

In running text, it is often best to avoid such complications by using dashes or similar devices.

### Apostrophes and Quotation Marks

The **apostrophe** generally indicates either possession or that one or more characters have been left out of a word or phrase (known as *contractions*).

Don’t trip on the cat’s toy mouse.

At RAND, we do not normally use contractions. For more on possessives, see Possessive Forms in Chapter Two.

**Single quotation marks** (single quotes) are essentially left and right apostrophes. These should **not** be used to indicate that a term is being used in an unusual way but should be reserved for quotations inside of quotations (see Quotations, below).

**Double quotation marks** (“double quotes”) indicate that the enclosed text is copied exactly from another source (oral or written).

*Smart quotes* is the term Microsoft and some other companies use to refer to typographer’s quotes (also sometimes called “curly quotes,” because of the way they look in many typefaces. If this feature is turned on it will automatically make single and double quotes and apostrophes curl the right way. However, be aware that if you need to put an

apostrophe on the front of a word, it will come out as a left-hand single quote unless you trick the program. For example, if you type straightforwardly, you will get the wrong curl:

'Tis the season to be jolly.

when you really wanted the following:

'Tis the season to be jolly.

That may be a bit difficult to see in some typefaces (including that used for other examples in this manual), but is usually very clear in serif faces, such as the Times Roman used in the examples just above. To get the correct character, type a “throw-away” character first, type the apostrophe, then delete the throwaway character.

## Slash

The **slash** (also known as the *solidus*, *virgule*, or *slant bar*) is not a punctuation mark but a form of shorthand that should be restricted to use in standard, defined abbreviations and (rarely) the phrase *and/or*. Although some authors use the slash in formal or technical writing, they assign such a wide variety of meanings to this symbol, some of them contradictory, that it may be difficult for the reader to guess the correct meaning. It is used, for example, to substitute for *and*, *or*, *and/or*, *per*, *to*, *for*, *versus*, hyphens, and dashes. Sometimes it merely indicates some loose, undefined relationship between two concepts and at other times denotes an equally vague opposition between them.

## QUOTATIONS

The principal use of quotation marks is to indicate **direct** quotations. The material within the quotation marks should be exactly as given in the original (apparent errors and all), except for (1) intentionally omitted material (see Punctuating Quotations, below) and (2) inserted editorial remarks, such as [*sic*], to indicate that an apparent error appears exactly as in the original.

Direct:

He said, “Yes, I’ll go.”

Indirect:

He said he would go.

Unverifiable quotations and paraphrases must not appear in quotation marks.

Quotations that consist of an entire sentence begin with a capital letter. A quotation that is less than a complete sentence does not begin with a capital letter and should fit grammatically into the sentence in which it is embedded.

In his opinion, dealing with anything more than the basics at this time would result in “an impossibly large backlog of orders.”

Long quotations (more than about three lines) are set off from the surrounding text, indented from both margins, and not bracketed with quotation marks.

A secondary use of quotation marks is to indicate a word that is being used in an unusual sense, such as *fences* in the discussions above.

Parentheses and Other “Fences”

Usually, this special sense is defined early on; thereafter, the word is used without the quotation marks. Also, a term preceded by *so-called* does not take quotation marks.

## Punctuating Quotations

A quotation that appears within another quotation is denoted by **single quotation marks** (which are actually apostrophes). If necessary, the next level of nesting would again use **double quotation marks**. The following example illustrates this nesting and the proper positioning of commas and periods with respect to the quotation marks. Commas and periods always go inside (and always inside the innermost set with “stacked” quotations).

Watkins then said, “The second article, ‘Recent SATCOM Efforts,’ was more extensive than the first, ‘A Review of “SATCOM Source Materials,”’ which was dated January 1980.”

**Question marks** go within the quotation marks if the quoted material is itself the question. If the entire sentence is the question, the mark goes outside the quotation marks.

He always asked the same question: “When will you come?”

What does she mean by “technologically depressed”?

Except when a quotation includes parenthetical material (in parentheses or brackets), all other forms of punctuation fall outside the quotation marks.

An **ellipsis** is the omission of some portion of quoted material and is indicated by three spaced periods, usually known as *ellipses* or *ellipsis points*.<sup>3</sup> If the omission follows a complete sentence, a single space follows the end punctuation, then the ellipsis points follow.<sup>4</sup> Thus, there may be four “periods” in a row; if a space precedes the first of the four, the actual end of the sentence has been deleted.

For most escape processing, there is no way to be certain where the line pointer is located . . . reset it using a command that invokes known pointer movement—e.g., NEXT or PRINT. . . . Hitting the escape key never causes exit from the Editor; it causes cancellation . . . . It is usually best to avoid using this function except in an emergency.

Ellipsis points should not “break” between lines. To prevent this, insert “nonbreaking” spaces between the points.

### Introductory Phrases

Short quotations generally have short phrases that identify the speaker, either as lead-ins or as interpolations. These are punctuated as follows:

A comma follows a phrase, such as “he said,” when it introduces a quotation.

He clearly said, “This is due Monday.”

Interpolated phrases are set off by commas.

“When this occurs,” the procedure states, “begin the next step.”

### TITLES

The basic format for titles and subtitles is *Title in Capitals and Lowercase: Subtitle in Capitals and Lowercase*. Note the use of the colon to distinguish the title from the subtitle; hyphens, dashes and other punctuation marks are not appropriate

<sup>3</sup>Note that the spaced periods do not symbolize a pause, but an omission. They should not be used to replace dashes or other forms of punctuation or to symbolize a speaker’s pause for breath or emphasis. Use an em-dash to indicate a pause.

<sup>4</sup>Quotations do not begin with ellipses; it is assumed that something may be “missing” at the beginning.

because they can be misunderstood as being part of the title.

Wherever volume numbers are used, the volume designation precedes the subtitle, as in *Title: Volume I, Subtitle*. In such cases, it is preferable to have different subtitles for Volume I and Volume II. If both volumes have the same subtitle, then the volume designation should appear after the subtitle, as *Title: Subtitle, Volume I*.

Volume numbers are generally not used for executive summaries, as *Title: Subtitle, Executive Summary*. Note that, in this and similar cases, a comma is used to set off the additional clarification.

Document titles occasionally include punctuation, for example, when the title is a question. In a bibliographic entry for such a document, no comma will follow the question mark (also note that, since the question mark is part of the title, it is italicized).

Lowy, Louis, and Darlene O’Connor, *Why Education in the Later Years?* Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1986.

Documents also often include subtitles, which on some RAND documents are set below and in a smaller typeface than the main title. In a bibliographic entry, the subtitle is separated from the main title by a colon.

*Detering or Coercing Opponents in Crisis: Lessons from the War with Saddam Hussein*

For more information on bibliographic entries and their punctuation, see Chapter Seven.

### LISTS

A **list** is a series of related words, phrases, clauses, or short paragraphs, arranged in a way that shows or emphasizes their relationship. A list (and any sublists within it) should consist of at least two items. The list can either be run in as part of a sentence or displayed—with individual items set off from the body of the text and each other, running vertically down the page.

#### Introducing a List

Each list has some sort of a lead-in phrase, clause, or sentence. The list itself follows logically and grammatically, and the content of the lead-in

should make the logic clear. A colon introduces a list only when this lead-in (1) is a complete sentence or (2) includes either of two phrases, *as follows* or *the following*. This is the case whether the list is run in or displayed.

### Run-In Lists

In its simplest form, a run-in list is just a series of items separated by commas.

This position requires someone who can at least read French, German, and Spanish.

He has quite a menagerie: two dogs, four cats, and a ferret.

Note that introducing a list with a colon does not necessarily require that items in the list be separated by semicolons. Semicolons are required only if they are otherwise necessary (see Semicolon, above).

To lend slightly more emphasis, and to make clear the “boundaries” between the items, the items are sometimes numbered or lettered.<sup>5</sup> The numbers or letters are enclosed in parentheses.

The key points here would have been as follows: (a) The United States had made no military preparations for intervention; (b) the Saudis were very unlikely to allow the United States to intervene . . . ; and (e) even if the risks were a bit higher, the likely gain would make running those risks worthwhile.

A variation is a series of discussions in which each point is introduced with a word or phrase, such as *First* or *Then*. These are not, strictly speaking, run-in lists, but the items in them and the way they are introduced should also be parallel in construction.

### Displayed or Bulleted Lists

In a displayed list, each item becomes a separate unit introduced by a bullet, number, or letter. Items in such a list should ordinarily be fairly short.

Lists that have long entries and extend over several pages take up a great deal of space and lose the visual impact a displayed list is intended to convey. Lists with long items or (especially) items that run

to multiple paragraphs probably should be converted into subsections with headings.

When the items in a bulleted list are a continuation of the sentence leading into them, they are not capitalized. If each item is itself a complete sentence, normal sentence capitalization and punctuation are used. Succeeding lines of the same item are blocked in under the first letter of the entry.

This arrangement has several potential benefits. Displayed lists

- lend more emphasis to the list itself and to its elements
- allow greater grammatical complexity within items
- allow longer items
- act as a form of punctuation themselves, decreasing the need for commas and semicolons
- can be stacked to allow clear sublists.

Bullets are the most common pegs; if a bulleted list has a sublist, em dashes are used. If a third level of sublist were needed, hyphens would be used (however, this should rarely be needed).

The issues we addressed included

- liability
  - theory
  - supporting facts
  - exposure to substance
- injuries
  - heterogeneity
  - documentation
  - general causation
  - specific causation
  - latency
  - future injuries.

Numbers and letters are only necessary if the surrounding text will refer back to specific items in a list. Numbering also implies ranking or sequence, which bullets do not. The number or letter is not enclosed in parentheses, but is followed by a period. If a numbered or lettered list has sublists, begin with bullets.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>This is especially useful when the items are long or grammatically complex. However, it is often better to use displayed listings in such cases.

<sup>6</sup>Note that since displayed listings are not technically paragraphs, neither the traditional outline system (I, A, 1, a, etc.) nor paragraph numbering (as in military specifications) is appropriate.

Each step in the inspection procedure emphasizes different attributes:

1. Physical dimensions
  - Length
  - Width
  - Height
2. Electrical properties
  - Maximum voltage
  - Dielectric strength
  - Rated capacitance.

Note also that, in this example, the items are not integral to the original sentence and are thus capitalized.

### The Forms and Punctuation of Items in a List

The items in a list must be grammatically parallel: all infinitive-form verbs, all noun phrases, all declarative sentences, all relative clauses, all paragraphs, and so on. Moreover, all similar lists in a document should be treated similarly.

I find household chores—such as washing, ironing, dusting, and vacuuming—anything but fulfilling.

Several possible systems of accountability can be considered:

- The state council or other body could set strict boundaries on what the provincial government could or could not do.
- The central government could approve a menu of policy options for choice by the province.
- The provincial government could be required to live within a fixed and predetermined budget.

**Punctuating Run-In Lists.** The punctuation for a run-in list follows all normal rules for the usage of commas and semicolons, regardless of whether the items are numbered and regardless of whether there is a colon. Because long sentences with complex punctuation can be difficult to follow (even for the writer), it is usually better to display such lists.

**Punctuating Displayed Lists.** The very format of a displayed list constitutes a form of punctuation. Also, unless the lead-in indicates otherwise, lists are understood to be inclusive. Thus, in most cases, commas, semicolons, and the word *and* are not

necessary. A period should end the whole list, to make clear that it is the end.

Suppose, for example, that the economics of the reconstruction of eastern Germany prove divisive as well as difficult. This could

- lead Germans to question other economic obligations they have undertaken
- bring about discord in the Western community, as well as with the East
- accelerate withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany but at the cost of raising other German suspicions
- affect the pace of European economic integration
- unleash political forces in the United States tending toward withdrawal.

Lists that consist of or include complete sentences must have a period (or a question mark) at the end of each item (see examples below). The *internal* punctuation of each item, however, follows standard rules.

Some items in displayed lists include one or more sentences that explain or expand on the item itself. In such cases, the item acts as a heading for what is in essence a descriptive paragraph. The first letter is capitalized, and the text is often either bold or in italics (at the discretion of the author and editor) and is followed with a period. For example:

Consequently, this report examines

- *The costs of compensation for personal injuries.* Will a no-fault system help reduce, or at least hold the line on, costs?
- *The share of the system's costs consumed in transactions.* Will a no-fault system provide compensation at lower transaction costs than the traditional approach?