

# A Guide to Punctuation

## Use italics...

**For titles of long works like books, magazines, journals, albums, series, or movies**

- *The Great Gatsby, Newsweek, The White Album, The Godfather, The Office*

**For foreign words or phrases**

- The beautiful cabinet was really the carpenter's *magnum opus*.

**To add emphasis to a word (use sparingly)**

- Though I haven't been to Disneyland, I *have* been to Disneyworld.

**For a word you are defining or discussing**

- *Grammar* is defined as "the whole system or structure of a language."

## Use apostrophes...

**To show ownership (before an s, or after the s in a plural word)**

- Brittany's homework, Joe's room, the college's policy, my brothers' wives, the team's uniforms, the employees' contracts, Jesus's parables

**In a contraction, to take the place of the missing letters**

- can't, don't, I'm, they've, we'll, won't, it's (it is)

## Use quotation marks...

**For titles of short works like short stories, articles, poems, episodes, or songs**

- "A Rose for Emily," "College Pressures," "Jabberwocky," "Before He Cheats"

**For exact wording taken from a source**

- The foreword to the *MLA Handbook* begins, "The *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* is designed to introduce you to the customs of a community of writers who greatly value scrupulous scholarship and the careful documentation, or recording, of research" (xv).

**For a cliché or a loaded word you want to distance yourself from**

- Unfortunately, I "can't hit the broad side of a barn" with a rubber band.
- The main character of the movie was very "blonde."

## Use single quotation marks...

**For a quote within a quote**

- Karla said, "Your sister was reading 'The Tell-Tale Heart' at lunchtime."

## Use dashes...

**To set off an interruption in the middle of a sentence, in place of parentheses or commas (dashes add more emphasis than parentheses do)**

- Soaring in a balloon—inventors first performed this feat in 1783—is a way to recapture the wonder that early aviators must have felt.

**To introduce an explanation or a list at the end of a sentence, in place of a colon**

- I have lived in four states—California, Michigan, Texas, and Tennessee.

Note: to create a dash, type a hyphen twice, and your word processor should autoformat it.

## Use hyphens...

**For compound words, especially adjectives or names**

- Some activists will only buy products from free-range livestock.
- My roommate studies early-thirteenth-century art.

## Use an ellipsis...

**To replace unneeded words in a quotation**

- In surveying various responses to plagues in the Middle Ages, Barbara W. Tuchman writes, “Medical thinking . . . stressed air as the communicator of disease, ignoring sanitation or visible carriers” (101-102).

## Use square brackets...

**To add words to a quotation for clarification**

- Milton’s Satan speaks of his “study [pursuit] of revenge.”
- In the first act he soliloquizes, “Why she would hang on him [Hamlet’s father] / As if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on....”

**For parentheses within parentheses**

- The sect known as the Jansenists (after Cornelius Jansen [1585-1638]) faced opposition from both the king and the pope.