

Punctuation – colons, semi-colons, commas and dashes

GRS Writing Group – WED 8 NOV 2017

*The big thing about language is that it always changes.
Since the Internet came along, it has never moved so fast.*

- David Crystal. <http://www.davidcrystal.com/?id=-1613>

Examiners can be critical of grammatical problems in a thesis, and are often more critical of grammatical and stylistic inconsistencies than consistent errors.

I recommend reading a reputable (and easy to read) style guide (or grammar guide or punctuation guide) for your discipline – you'll learn how to punctuate text consistently and appropriately for your discipline and you'll probably learn some rules you weren't even aware existed.

If you have specific problems, StudySmarter have drop-in sessions where you can get one-on-one advice about your writing.

http://www.student.uwa.edu.au/learning/studysmarter/writesmart/writesmart_drop-in

Punctuation Made Simple is a helpful resource for punctuation because it provides a description of why text needs to be punctuated.

<http://punctuationmadesimple.org/introduction.html>

- Colons introduce words, sentences OR lists.
- Semi-colons connect two sentence OR act as supercommas in lists with complex items.
- Commas glue two sentences together (using conjunction) OR add information to front, back or middle of sentence OR separate items in list.
- Hyphens join 2 or more terms together (without any spaces).
- En dashes are used between numbers, dates, times, connected terms (longer than hyphen).
- Em dashes are used in place of comma to provide special emphasis on text (longer than en dash).

Vertical and horizontal lists (also known as run-on or in-line lists) can be particularly hard to punctuate.

Colons can be used to introduce a list BUT they must follow a complete sentence. If you wouldn't put a colon between the list stem and the first list item then you don't need a colon.

✓ *A thesis often includes ten elements: title page, abstract, table of contents, introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, references and appendices.*

× *The ten elements of a thesis are: title page, abstract, table of contents, introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, references and appendices.*

Supercommas can be used in lists with complex items.

Each research participant was given an item to discuss: a paper, which all participants saw in the previous experiment; a media report, which only half of the participants saw in the previous experiment; or both the paper and the media report.

Style choices in vertical lists – capitalization of first letter of item & full stops.

- ✓ Before you travel overseas, remember to
 - make sure your passport is current.
 - find out if you need any research approvals.
 - submit an overseas travel form.
- ✓ Before you travel overseas, remember to
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Microsoft capitalizes all list items as default autocorrect setting – you can turn this autocorrect function off. <https://support.microsoft.com/en-au/help/291473/how-to-turn-off-autoformat-options-in-word>

You may want to add full stop to each list item if you need to include extra information to a bullet point. While it is acceptable to have an additional sentence with no full stop, it looks odd.

- ✓ Before you travel overseas, remember to
 - Make sure your passport is current. You may need to apply for a new passport if it has expired (this item is correctly punctuated but looks odd without a final full stop)
 - Find out if you need any research approvals
 - Submit an overseas travel form



General grammatical advice

Grammar Girl Quick and Dirty Tips

<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar>

Oxford Comma

<http://thewritepractice.com/why-you-need-to-be-using-oxford-commas/>

Hyphens, endash and emdash

<http://www.thepunctuationguide.com/>

How do I insert an En dash or Em dash in Microsoft Word?

<https://www.computerhope.com/issues/ch001084.htm>

Conjunctions - for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so....

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/conjunctions/>

APA blog Lists

<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/02/lists-part-1-parallelism.html>



Just for fun

16 Unfortunate Misuses of Punctuation

<http://mashable.com/2012/09/24/misuses-punctuation/#0x2xoHkfCGqz>

Next session: WED NOV 22 Writing about Statistics

Further details of the UWA GRS Writing Group, including advice sheets to download, here:

www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources/communities#writinggroup