

# BASIC RULES OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR

## (PUNCTUATION MARKS AND CAPITALISATION)

### 1. FULL STOP (.)

The full stop is primarily used to end a sentence.

It is also used after initials, for abbreviations, personal titles of address, acronyms and initials.

- Use the full stop at the end of a complete sentence that is a statement.

**Example:**

- Hephzibah dances very well.
- Question marks and exclamation points replace and eliminate the full stop at the end of a sentence.

**Examples:**

- Ebuka is such a voracious boy!. **(incorrect)**.
- Ebuka is such a voracious boy! **(correct)**.
  
- Is Ebuka truly a voracious boy?. **(incorrect)**.
- Is Ebuka truly a voracious boy? **(correct)**.

## 2. Comma (,)

**Rule 1.** Use commas to separate words and word groups in a simple series of three or more items.

**Example:**

- My estate goes to my boyfriend, his mother, sister and nephew.

**Rule 2.** Use a comma after certain words that introduce a sentence, such as well, yes, no, why, hello, hey, etc.

**Examples:**

- Well, Seun has been promoted at work!
- No, Gabriel can't have a ticket to visit London.

**Rule 3.** Use commas to set off expressions that interrupt the sentence flow (nevertheless, after all, by the way, on the other hand, however, etc.).

**Example:**

- I am, by the way, very nervous about this presentation.

### 3. Semicolons(;

A semicolon is a full stop atop a comma. Like commas, semicolons indicate an audible pause and it is primarily used to link correlating sentences together.

**Rule 1.** Avoid using a comma when a semicolon is needed .

**Incorrect:** Divine has a soft spot for dark women, he also loves them skinny .

**Correct:** Divine has a soft spot for dark women; he also loves them skinny .

**Rule 2.** A semicolon can replace a period if the writer wishes to narrow the gap between two closely linked sentences.

#### Examples:

- *Call me tomorrow; you can give me an answer then.*
- *Chidimma has prayed to God; she is expecting wonderful testimonies.*

**Rule 3.** Use a semicolon before such words and terms as *namely, however, therefore, that is, i.e., for example, e.g., for instance, etc.*, when they introduce a complete sentence. It is also preferable to use a comma after these words and terms.

#### Example:

- *Bring any two items; however, shoes and bags are not in short supply.*



## 4. Colons(:)

A colon means "that is to say" or "here's what I mean." Colons and semicolons should never be used interchangeably.

**Rule 1.** Use a colon to introduce a series of items. Do not capitalize the first item after the colon (unless it's a proper noun).

**Examples:**

- *VSF staff are required to bring the following items: headsets, bags and shoes.*
- *Tonia needs the following items: creams, iPhone 6 and dogs.*

**Rule 2.** Avoid using a colon before a list when it directly follows a verb or preposition.

**Incorrect:** I want: superbite, coke and ice cream.

**Correct:** I want the following: superbite, coke and ice cream.

OR

I want superbite, coke and ice cream.

**Rule 3.** Use a colon rather than a comma to follow the salutation in a business letter, even when addressing someone by his or her first name. A comma is used after the salutation in more informal correspondence.

**Formal:** Dear Ms. Laretta:

**Informal:** Dear Laretta,

**Rule 4.** Avoid the common mistake of using a semicolon to replace a colon.

**Incorrect:** *Dimeji has a dream; to be Africa's sixth richest president.*

**Correct:** *Dimeji has a dream: to be Africa's sixth richest president.*

## 5. Quotation Marks ("") (")

**Rule 1.** Use double quotation marks to set off a direct (word-for-word) quotation.

**Correct:** "When will Uwem return from Chibok?" Nwanneka asked.

**Incorrect:** Nwanneka asked "when Uwem will return from Chibok."

**Rule 2.** Full stops and commas always go inside quotation marks.

**Examples:**

➤ Owolabi yelled, "Sys. up."

➤ Ada said "Wait." Then she said, "You may go," then, "Come back," all in five seconds.

**Rule 3.** Use single quotation marks for quotations within quotations.

**Example:**

➤ Sandra said, "Bola cried, 'Do not treat me that way.'"

## 6. Parentheses ( )

**Rule 1.** Use parentheses to enclose information that clarifies or is used as an aside.

**Example:**

➤ Ngozi finally answered (after taking five minutes to think) that her boyfriend works in a bakery.

**Rule 2.** If material in parentheses ends a sentence, the full stop goes after the parentheses.

**Example:**

➤ The Unit Head gave Peiu a nice bonus (N5,000).

- The use of parentheses indicates that the writer considered the information less important—almost an afterthought.

**Rule 3.** The full stop goes inside parentheses only if an entire sentence is inside the parentheses.

**Example:**

- Please read Shina's essay (You'll be amazed.)

## 7. Brackets [ ]

Brackets are far less common than parentheses, and they are only used in special cases. Brackets (like single quotation marks) are used exclusively within quoted material.

**Rule 1.** Brackets are interruptions. They are used to explain or comment on the quotation.

**Example:**

- Seun said, "Lilian was on vacation with [her boyfriend] Suleiman."

**Rule 2.** When quoting something that has a spelling or grammar mistake or presents material in a confusing way, insert the term *sic* in italics.

*Sic* means "This is exactly what the original material says."

**Example:**

- Efosa wrote, "Bukky would rather die then [sic] see a lady hugging Sholape."

The [sic] indicates that **then** was mistakenly used instead of **than**.



## 8. Apostrophes(')

**Rule 1.** Use the apostrophe to show possession. To show possession with a singular noun, add an apostrophe plus the letters **s**.

**Examples:**

- Janet's phone.
- Our boss' sanctum.

**Rule 2.** Do not use an apostrophe + s to make a regular noun plural.

**Incorrect:** Apostrophe's are confusing.

**Correct:** Apostrophes are confusing.

**Incorrect:** We've had many happy Christmas's in the team.

**Correct:** We've had many happy Christmases in the team.

## 9. Hyphens(-)

Hyphens' main purpose is to glue words together. They notify the reader that two or more elements in a sentence are linked.

**Rule 1.** Hyphens must never be used interchangeably with dashes, which are noticeably longer.

**Incorrect:** 300—325 people

**Correct:** 300-325 people

**Rule 2.** Second, there should never be spaces around hyphens.

**Incorrect:** 300 - 325 people

**Correct:** 300-325 people

## 10. Ellipsis(...)

An ellipsis (plural: ellipses) consists of three dots. Ellipses save space or remove material that is less relevant. They are useful in getting right to the point without delay or distraction.

**Rule 1.** Use an ellipsis when omitting a word, phrase, line, paragraph, or more from a quoted passage.

**Example:**

➤ **Full quotation:** "Today, after hours of careful thought, Tobi agreed to marry Desmond."

**With ellipsis:** "Today...Tobi agreed to marry Desmond."

**Rule 2.** Many writers use an ellipsis whether the omission occurs at the beginning of a sentence, in the middle of a sentence or between sentences.

A common way to delete the beginning of a sentence is to follow the opening quotation mark with an ellipsis, plus a bracketed capital letter:

**Example:**

➤ "...[A]fter hours of careful thought, Tobi agreed to marry Desmond."

**Rule 3.** Ellipses can express hesitation, changes of mood, suspense, or thoughts trailing off. It can also be used to indicate a pause or wavering in a sentence.

**Examples:**

➤ *I don't know...I'm not sure.*

➤ *Bisola said, "I...really don't...know how to use an ATM card."*



## 11. Dashes(—)

**Dashes**, like commas, semicolons, colons, ellipses, and parentheses, indicate added emphasis, an interruption, or an abrupt change of thought.

**Examples:**

➤ Kunle is the friend, the only friend, who offered to help me.

Kunle is the friend—the only friend—who offered to help me.

**Rule 1.** It can be used to illustrate a relationship between two things.

**Example:**

➤ Dubai—Doha flight.

## 12. Exclamation mark(!)

**Rule 1.** An exclamation mark is used to show emotion, emphasis or surprise.

**Example:**

➤ I am thunderstruck by your behaviour!

➤ Yay! I am in love!

**Rule 2.** It replaces a full stop in a sentence.

**Example:**

- I am indisputably shocked by your behaviour!. **(Incorrect).**
- I am indisputably shocked by your behaviour! **(correct).**

**Rule 3.** Do not use an exclamation mark in formal business writing.

**Rule 4.** Overuse of exclamation marks is a sign of undisciplined writing.

### 13. Question mark(?)

**Rule 1.** Use a question mark only after a direct question.

**Example:**

- Can I have some suaar?

**Rule 2.** Use a question mark when a sentence is half statement and half question.

**Example:**

- You aren't going to break up with me, are you?

**Rule 3.** The placement of a question mark should be within a quotation mark, if the question is within the quoted material.

**Example:**

- He said, "Opeyemi, will you marry me?"

**Rule 4.** Avoid the common trap of using a question mark with indirect sentence.

**Example:**

- I thought the director was leaving?

## 14. Slash (/)

**Rule 1.** It is used to substitute the conjunction **or** which indicates a choice.

**Example:**

- Is Minerva a mother/child?

**Rule 2.** There are usually no spaces either before or after a slash.

**Example:**

- Our branch at Yaba is located at 260/262 Herbert Macaulay way.

Capitalisation is the writing of a word with its first letter in uppercase and the remaining letters in lowercase.

It has been observed that most writers are stingy with capitals. It is best not to use them if there is any doubt.

### Capitalization

The difference between helping your Uncle Jack off a horse, and helping your uncle jack off a horse.