



TOP TIPS TO IMPROVE ESSAY WRITING

2. PUNCTUATION



’ Apostrophe

These are used to show ownership; e.g. *This is Sam’s car* (This ownership rule doesn’t apply to *its, his hers* or *theirs*). Apostrophes are also used to contract words; e.g. *do not* becomes *don’t*. Contracted words are not common usage in academic writing. Apostrophes are not used to form plurals; e.g. *I like chips* doesn’t need an apostrophe.

() Brackets

Also known as parentheses; these are used to add extra information at the end of a sentence; e.g. *This is a sentence (which can also contain parentheses)*.

● Colon

Colons are used before the start of a list or a lengthy quotation: *“James went to university; the things he took with him included: shoes, chocolate, a teddy, soap and a guitar.”*

’ Comma

These are used to give a slight pause in a sentence, to help with its meaning. They help to make more sense when reading, give clarity and break up lists.

— Dash

(See also Hyphen) This can be used in two ways—a long dash with no spaces is used the same way a colon is. A short dash with a space either side is used in the same way as brackets - it allows for extra information.

●●● Ellipsis

Three dots signify the trailing off of or pause in a sentence; e.g. *I don’t know... It may be I need help.*

! Exclamation Mark

These are used to show a strong emotion.
● They are not appropriate for academic writing, although you may use them if you are quoting someone who was speaking in an excited way.

● Full Stop

These indicate the end of a sentence. A sentence is a set of words that is complete in itself. Full stops also show a word that has been shortened; e.g. *My address is 16 Green Cl., Brighton.*

— Hyphen

(See also Dash) A hyphen is used to join two words to make meaning clear; e.g. *I go to a Metal-friendly pub*. If it was written: *‘I go to a Metal friendly pub’*, it could mean a friendly pub made of metal.

You also use a hyphen to break up words when they carry onto a new line.

? Question Mark

Use this at the end of a sentence, which is a question (it replaces the full stop).

“ ” Quotation marks

These show when speech is being written or another text is being quoted; e.g. *Sharon said “I love your blue hair”*. *2019’s highest-paid Hip-Hop artist has been announced: “Kanye Tops Jay-Z To Claim Crown”* (Forbes, 2020).

● Semi colon

These are used to link two related sentences together; e.g. *We have paid our student fees on time each year; we expect to have certain conditions met by the university*. They are also used before a joining word such as *but, however plus and - but* only when it links two separate issues; e.g. *I went to the shop to buy some fruit and cakes. I went to the shop to buy some cakes; and on the way home I ate them all.*