Importance of Punctuation in Research Papers (Part 1)

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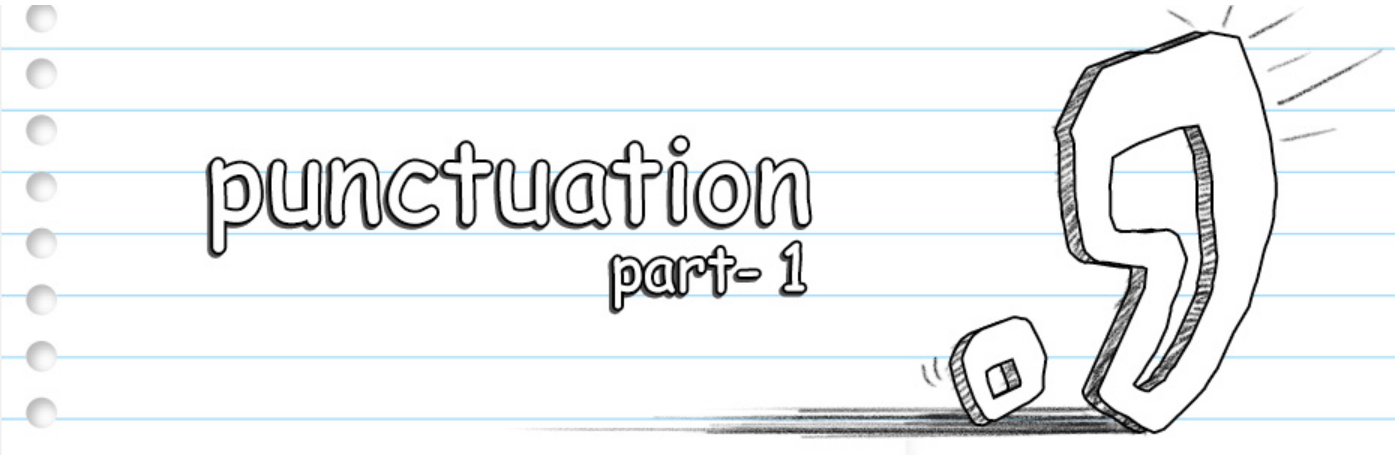

Why is Punctuation Important?

Writing formally in English is more than just choosing the right words in the right order.

- Using punctuation in your writing helps the reader to clearly understand the message that is being conveyed.
- A wrongly used punctuation or a missing punctuation can change the entire meaning of a sentence.
- Punctuation primarily helps to indicate the pauses and the emphasis on certain ideas or thoughts that are discussed in the text.
- Particularly, in academic writing, it is essential to accurately use punctuation as it helps to strengthen arguments that are made in the text.

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One way of using punctuations correctly in writing is by taking help of grammar checker tools. While there are various such tools available online, Trinka is our recommended choice. Reason being its robust AI-powered language enhancement ability is uniquely designed for academic writing. Trinka understands the specific requirements of academic writing and helps you write better, right from correcting advanced English grammar errors to fixing scientific tone and style.

However, even with such smart assistance, it is helpful for authors to know about the correct usage of punctuations. Here, we give you an overview of two of the most common punctuation marks: the period and comma.

The Period

In British English, the period is known as the “full stop,” which neatly summarizes its major purpose: to help end a sentence. While most other punctuation marks in formal English mark a pause in a sentence or add emphasis, the period completes a sentence.

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In academic writing, periods are also used to denote an abbreviation has been used. In science, the most commonly used abbreviation form is “et al.,” which is an abbreviation of the Latin *et alii*. A list of Latin abbreviations that are used in academic writing is as follows:

1. et cetera = etc.
2. nota bene = n.b.
3. conferre = cf.
4. ibidem = ibid.

For those who find such abbreviations difficult to remember and use, try out Trinka. It can help you in using periods correctly.

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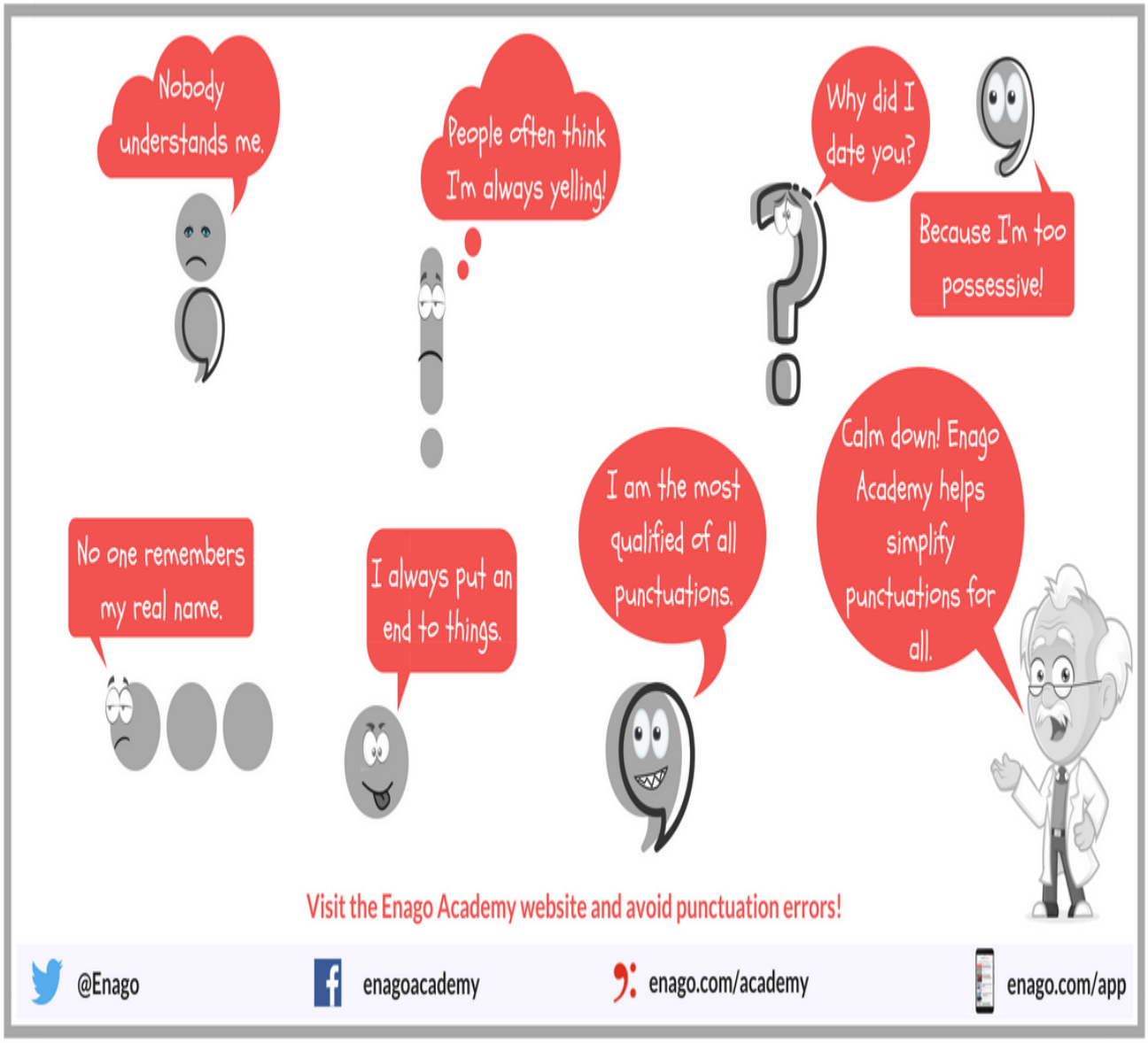
Finally, three periods in a row are called an *ellipsis* and this indicates that entire words have been cut out of a quote. For example, here is a full quote from a newspaper article:

“I hope it’s only a matter of time before, in the same spirit, we reimagine zoos.”

However, in our work, we do not need the complete subordinate clause, so we can use an ellipsis to cut it out while demonstrating academic rigor by acknowledging that we have edited the quote:

“I hope it’s only a matter of time before…we reimagine zoos.”



The Comma

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The comma is one of the most misused of the common punctuation marks, probably because it has so many technical uses: a comma acts to separate subordinate clauses from the main sentence clause. The three primary functions of comma in academic writing are as follows:

1. Separating Adverbial or Introductory Phrases from the Main Clause

This is a very common use in academic writing, which relies on transitional and adverbial phrases to develop a line of argument. Some very common examples are:

- However, the…
- Therefore, researchers argue…
- As a result, participants…
- After this occurred, the…

2. Separating Dependent Clauses from the Main Clause

This is common in complex academic writing, where certain concepts often require nuance or additional information. The purpose of such commas is to clearly demonstrate to the reader the essential information that is part of the main clause and the non-essential information that provides additional information.

The subordinate clause can be in the middle of the sentence, which requires a comma before and after it. For example:

- “I hope it’s only a matter of time before, in the same spirit, we reimagine zoos.”
- This issue is, as described previously, central to this work.
- The book, claimed Smith, was found in an attic.

OR

It can be placed at the beginning or end of the sentence, requiring just one comma. For example:

- In the same spirit, I hope it’s only a matter of time before we reimagine zoos.
- This issue is central to this work, as described previously.
- The book was found in an attic, claimed Smith.

3. Separating a List of Items

This is the most well-known use of the comma; however, there is a point of contention around what is known as the o*xford comma* or the *serial comma*. In American English, it is mandatory to have the Oxford comma, whereas, in British English, this comma is required only when you require clarity in a given list of items. Thus, using the Oxford/Serial comma helps improve clarity in a given list although it may simply be a matter of style. For example:

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- The organization has recently expanded into China, Brazil, India, and Russia.
- The application can be downloaded to PCs, smartphones, tablets, and iPods.
- The mice demonstrated higher fecundity, improved appetite, and increased activity.

Common Comma Mistakes

Commas have many uses, and, as a result, there are many ways that they can be used incorrectly. Three issues which appear regularly in academic writing are the comma splice, the missing comma, and the extra comma.

The Extra Comma

A comma splice is a comma that is placed randomly in a sentence. It often appears because writers feel that the sentence requires a pause, as a common way of teaching comma use is to describe them as a pause or a place to take a breath. While this is useful for school children, it leads to many mistakes in formal writing. A comma should never come between the main clause and its subordinate clause, a verb and its direct object or objects joined by a conjunction. These commas are all used incorrectly:

- One should never, argue with a deconstructionist.
- The song refers to holly and ivy.
- It is important to remember to, feed the mice.

The Missing Comma

Missing commas are common because writers are often afraid of overusing them, or using them incorrectly, and so they avoid them altogether. This results in sentences that make little sense or have an ambiguous meaning. These sentences all require commas:

- However, the penny fell onto its side.
- The executive director who was known to be short-tempered told his subordinates that they needed to do better.
- The application can scan print save send and edit documents.

The Comma Splice

A comma splice is a comma which separates two independent clauses which should be separated by another form of punctuation, such as a period, a semicolon or a subordinating or coordinating conjunction. The use of a comma is incorrect in English because it combines two independent thoughts that should be clearly and distinctly separated. Here we see some comma splices and ways to correct them:

- The audience did not enjoy the movie, they felt the story was unrealistic.
- The audience did not enjoy the story because they felt the story was unrealistic.

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- 87% of participants agreed that they were satisfied, the test was successful.
- 87% of participants agreed that they were satisfied, therefore the test was successful.

- Participant A did not understand the computer, he had not read the manual.
- Participant A did not understand the computer. He had not read the manual.

I hope this article helped you learn the difference between a period and a comma and how to use each of them correctly in your writing. You can also check out Trinka, to improve your writing for punctuation usage and all other grammar and language corrections. It is a one-stop solution to all your writing enhancement needs. Now that you have explored a period and a comma so closely, test your knowledge by attempting a fun exercise here: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_55.htm.

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