

The Problem of Using Punctuation Marks by 2nd Years Students

Asst. Lect. Dhafar Hisham Othman
Al- Noor University College
dhafar.hisham@alnoor.edu.iq

1. Nazik Ibrahim Younis
 2. Hiba Qahtan Muhammed
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Abstract

Punctuation errors can be a tricky thing to tackle. There are a lot of different punctuation marks to remember, and each has its own unique rules and uses. It is important to use appropriate punctuation marks to avoid misunderstandings and to convey your intended meaning clearly in written communication.

English punctuation marks serve to clarify the meaning, tone, and rhythm of written language. This research will investigate the errors committed by second year students at Al-Noor University College, English department.

Keywords: Punctuation Marks, Errors.

1. Introduction

Punctuation marks are symbols used in writing to clarify meaning and add emphasis. Punctuation marks are essential components of written language that aid in the clarification, emphasis, and organization of ideas. These symbols, including commas, periods, colons, semicolons, exclamation points, and question marks, help convey intended meaning and tone in written communication. Different cultures and languages have used different sets of punctuation marks throughout history. In ancient Greece, punctuation was not consistently used. However, in Rome, punctuation saw its first systematic use. Also, medieval writing featured scriptoria where manuscripts were meticulously transcribed by hand, so punctuation played an important role in recording the spoken word with clarity.

Over time, the use of punctuation has evolved, with some marks disappearing while others became more commonly used. Today, punctuation marks such as periods, commas, semi-colons, colons, and exclamation points are widely recognized and utilized in many languages.

2. Punctuation Marks

Punctuation is a mixed bag of absolute rules, general conventions, and individual options. Kane (1988) (p. 380).

According to Truss, Lynne (2003 - 612) “In written English, punctuation is vital to disambiguate the meaning of sentences. For example: “Woman,

without her man, is nothing”(emphasizing the importance of men), and “woman: without her, man is noting” (emphasizing the importance of women) have very different meanings; as do “ eats shoots and leaves “ (which means the subject consumes plant growths) and “ eats , shoots , and leaves “ (which means the subject eat first , then fires a weapon , and then leaves the scene) .

3. Types of Punctuation Marks

Punctuation marks are symbols we use in writing to clarify meaning and make reading easier. According to Kane (1988), “Punctuation is a mixed bag of absolute rules, general conventions, and individual options” (p. 380). In order to punctuate effectively, students have to distinguish rules from conventions and from options too.

The punctuation marks are: Comma (,), Period (.), Semicolon (;), Question mark (?), Colon (:), Quotation marks (" "), Exclamation marks (!), Brackets (()), Dash (—) and Hyphen (-).

1. The Comma (,): it is used to separate items in a list. The comma is used frequently more than the other punctuation marks. There are several uses of comma; these are the common:
 - Commas are used to separate adjectives.
 - Commas are used to separate clauses.
2. The Period/Full Stop (.): The period (U.S.), the full stop (U.K. and commonwealth) is usually used at the end of complete sentences. It indicates that a point has been made and that the writer is about to move on to further points. It is also placed at the end of commands, requests, indirect questions, and imperative sentences.
 - It shows smaller numbers than one (01), For example: 1.20
 - It is used with abbreviations: Dr., Mr., Ms.
 - It is used to separate the hour figure, which shows the minutes and seconds that indicates the time: 05.32.40 AM.
3. The Semicolon (;): Semicolons can be used in two ways: to separate independent clauses, and to separate items in a list when those items contain commas.
 - Basketball was invented in the United States (USA); it is now popular all over the world.

- “All I’m taking on the road trip is my truck, along with its spare tire; a radio, which only kind of works; and my dog.” (The Farlex Grammar Book Volume II) • “Jen hadn’t enjoyed the play; as a result, she didn’t recommend it to her friend.” (Farlex, 2017).
4. The Question Mark (?): The question mark simply used after direct questions including rhetorical ones. For instance,” How are you today?”, and “How and to what purpose?” Indirect questions never be closed by a question mark but with a period as well.
- “She asked if she is going home” (Chermechou and Bettiche ,2017.6)
 - “How are you feeling?”
 - “You can’t be serious, can you?” (Farlex, 2017).

5. the Colon are two dots (which appears at the end of a clause and introduce specification, often in the form of a list or series. As stated in *The Oxford Essential Guide to writing*, “The colon along with the semicolon, the comma, and the dash is an internal stop. That is, it is used only inside a sentence and never at its end.” (Kane,1989, p.387).For Instance,” There are basically four types of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound complex.
(Chermechou and Bettiche ,2017.)
 - “There are a few things you’ll need for the trip: a flashlight, a good Compass, a water purifying kit, clean clothes for seven days, comfortable hiking shoes, and a heavy-duty rucksack.
 - “If there’s anything I’ve learned from working here, it’s this: you don’t get ahead in this industry by doing the bare minimum.
 - “My father had a phrase he was fond of repeating: ‘Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.’
6. Quotation Marks: Whenever we reproduce exactly what someone else has said, whether it’s a word, phrase, or entire sentence, we use quotation marks, either double (“ ”) Or single (‘ ’), to separate it from the rest of our writing. For instance:
 - John said, “I’ll never live in this city again.”
 - The CEO has expressed his ‘genuine concern and remorse’ over the developments.
7. Exclamation Points: An exclamation point or exclamation mark (!) is commonly used to express strong, intense emotions in declarations or to add emphasis to interjections and commands.
 - “I can’t wait to travel to Paris next week!”
 - “I can’t believe I got into law school!”
 - “Yuck! I hate coconuts!”
8. Parentheses: Parentheses (()), sometimes called round brackets, are used to separate parenthetical information that has no grammatical bearing on the structure of the overall sentence. This can be a clause, phrase, word, or even just a punctuation.
 - “As I have said before (on numerous occasions), we must find a long-term solution to this problem.”

- “The goal by Hendrickson (and what a goal!) secured the team’s entry into the championship finals.”
 - “She said I had behaved ‘like a yak’ (?) as she was leaving.”
9. Dashes: There are two types of dashes: the en dash (–) and the em dash (—) en dashes are the preferred punctuation mark (especially in publishing) to express ranges, scores, voting results, or connections between two people or things (although hyphens are very commonly used instead). For instance:
- “We need you to submit your expense report for January–March.”
 - “I’ll be in the office 8:00 AM–4:00 PM this Friday.”
 - “The board voted 5–4 to accept the proposal.”
10. Hyphens: Hyphens (-) are most often used to join two or more words and/or affixes to form a single and unique compound word. For example:
- “Do you have any sugar-free cookies?”
 - “It is the only 10-storey building in the town.”
 - “My old-fashioned aunt would never approve.”
- (The Farlex Grammar Book Volume II).

4. Sampling of the Study

This research is aimed at finding out the different kinds of errors made by second year students at Al-Noor University College, English department. Twenty students were given a paragraph without punctuation marks and were asked to punctuate it, the paragraph is given at the end of this research, in the appendix. They were 12 females, and 8 males.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

The quantitative method is the appropriate one to count and investigate the types and the frequency of punctuation errors made by second year students. This method explains mainly some phenomena by collecting numeral data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods. It is the appropriate method because of its objectivity and generalization to the population under study.

Before starting to analyze the data, one has to know the difference between an error and mistake. Ellis stated that: “Errors reflect gaps in a learner’s knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct” (1997, p. 17).

In other words, errors are due to the lack of comprehending linguistic rules, and those errors cannot be corrected by learners themselves. Errors are unintentional and often result from a lack of knowledge or understanding. For example, a person who is learning a new language might make grammatical errors. Mistakes, on the other hand, are intentional and result from a data entry error, miscalculation, or a lapse in attention. For example, accidentally typing $2+2=5$ instead of $2+2=4$ is a mistake. In summary, errors stem from a lack of knowledge while mistakes result more often from inattention or incorrectly executing procedures.

In our test we focus on six punctuation marks that is used by the students more than others. These are the semicolon, apostrophe, capitalization, comma, period and the colon.

6. Conclusion

Punctuation marks are essential components of written language that aid in the clarification, emphasis, and organization of ideas. These symbols, including commas, periods, colons, semicolons, exclamation points, and question marks, help convey intended meaning and tone in written communication. Punctuation marks also play a significant role in differentiating between sentence types, such as declarative, interrogative, or exclamatory sentences. Proper use of punctuation marks facilitates effective communication and can prevent ambiguity and confusion. However, misusing or omitting punctuation marks can lead to misunderstanding or misinterpretation of written text. Therefore, understanding the function and usage of punctuation marks is crucial for effective writing and communication.

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