



Punctuation **That!**

Leah Guren

In Other WORDS



Session Overview

-
- The argument for good punctuation
 - A review of basic punctuation marks
 - Capitalization
 - Q&A



The Argument for Good Punctuation

Why bother? Does it really matter? Do the great unwashed masses notice the difference?



Why Bother?

- **Myth:** The average reader is *punctuationally illiterate*.
- **Reality:** Someone who can't cook can still recognize good food!
- **Myth:** The focus of our jobs as TCs isn't to be the Punctuation Police.
- **Reality:** Yes, but if *we* don't get it right, no one will.
- **Bottom line:** It really matters!



Punctuation and Parsing

Our brain needs punctuation to grasp meaning:

- woman without her man is nothing
- Woman without her man is nothing.
- Woman: without her, man is nothing.
- Only Senator Fredericks is capable of stopping the strike, and the moment he stops demonstrating that, he has no control over the unions...
- Only Senator Fredericks is capable of stopping the strike, and the moment he stops demonstrating that he has no control over the unions...



Data

Mistakes in punctuation:

- Slow down reading rate.
- Reduce comprehension.
- Make users suspicious of the documentation.
- Create an image of inferior quality of the product.



The Argument for Good Punctuation: Review

- Why bother?
- What is the real purpose of punctuation?
- Why is it important that *we* know this stuff?



The Basic Punctuation Marks

Let's review the basics, including proper usage and special conditions in TC.

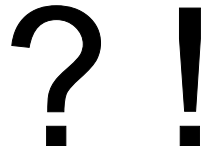


Full Stops ■

- A full stop (aka period) is required at the end of every full sentence.
- All procedure steps are complete sentences.
- Items that are not full sentences (such as bullet list items) do not require closing punctuation.
- Consider going back to French spacing.



Question Marks and Bangs



- If it is a question, use a question mark.
 - Can you name the 15 largest cities in Israel?
 - Do you have time to meet this afternoon?
- Avoid the common mistakes.
 - Is there room in your carpool for me.
 - The poodle ate your homework?
- Use bangs (aka exclamation points) with discretion.



Commas ,

- Use the breathing rule.
- Avoid the ultimate mistake of the too-weak comma.
 - It was too cold, they went inside.
- Use closed vs. open punctuation.
 - Open: apples, oranges and pears
 - Closed (aka the serial comma; preferred for TC): red, blue, and green
- Use the optional comma.
 - Use with all conditionals and similar constructs
 - From the main toolbar, select...
 - If the system times out, reset...
- Multiple adjectives no longer always need commas.



Colons



-
- Use colons to introduce lists or offset quotations.
 - Avoid using in titles.
 - Do not capitalize after a colon in running text.
 - The system sets three levels: normal function, exception cases, and emergencies.
 - Remember, colons in running text may be a red flag to break things out into lists!



Semicolons

▪
;

- Use a semicolon to connect related independent clauses.
 - Roger was hammered; he regretted those last five margaritas.
- Use to separate items in a complex list.
 - System function follows a set pattern: the value is passed to the server; the packet is checked; the data is compiled.
- Again, this can be a red flag to break things out.



Dashes



- Use a hyphen for:
 - Hyphenated compounds (mass-produced)
 - Stacked modifiers (water-table analysis mode)
 - End-of-line hyphenation
 - Minus sign in equations
- Use an en dash to indicate a range.
 - Read pp. 27–48.
 - The course runs from June–September.
- Use an em dash to separate clauses.
 - Sue felt queasy—those seven corn dogs were barking.
- Don't bound dashes with spaces.



Parentheses

()

- Use for spell-outs of acronyms and initializations.
 - Version 7.2 supports TBC (Total Bovine Control).
- Use for layered detail.
 - Household pets (including fish) must be licensed.
- Punctuate parentheticals properly.
 - ...poodles (see *Dorky Pets*, p. 43).
 - ...poodles. (For more details, see *Dorky Pets*, p. 43.)
- What do they imply?



All data, including test cases, must be installed to the same folder.

All data (including test cases) must be installed to the same folder.

All data—including test cases—must be installed to the same folder.



“ ”

Quotation Marks

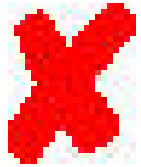
- Use printers' quotation marks rather than straight ASCII quotes.
- Follow proper usage rules.
 - Direct quotes (Egbert said, “Boy, I hate my job.”)
 - Journal articles (Parker Pinkerton, “The Power of Pulp,” *Science*, May 2004)
- Punctuation goes *inside* quotation marks.
- Incorrect usage is linked to a negative implication.
 - Moshe is “out sick” today.
- Avoid single quotes.



Custom-defined objects must be generated as "interface only".



Custom-defined objects must be generated as *interface only*.



...if the name of the file is "format_R8G8B8A0.c", set the conditionals to...



...if the name of the file is `format_R8G8B8A0.c`, set the conditionals to...



Capitalization

- Use title capitalization for all headings.
 - Creating a Disaster Recovery Plan
- Use title capitalization for interface elements.
 - Bad: In the New User dialog box, select Color defined by user.
 - Better: In the New User dialog box, select Color Defined by User.
- Avoid sentence capitalization for proper nouns.



Miscellaneous

- Virgule (aka slash or solidus) /
- Back slash (aka reverse solidus or slosch) \
- Pipe (aka vertical line or bar) |
- Brackets (aka square brackets) []
- Braces (aka curly braces) { }
- Angle brackets (aka less-than and greater-than signs) < >
- Asterisk (aka star or splat) *



The Basics: Review

- Why is closed punctuation so important in TC?
- How can incorrect dashes force users to reread material?
- Why is choosing the appropriate punctuation sometimes a question of tone?
- How does the misuse of quotation marks diminish the seriousness of a product?
- How does capitalization help comprehension?
- What is one thing you learned today?



References

- Chicago Manual of Style
- www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/cmosfaq/cmosfaq.html
- www.grammarbook.com
- www.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar
- www.grammarnow.com



In Other WORDS

In Other WORDS provides a wide range of technical communication services, including technical writing, technical illustration, graphic design, copywriting, Web design, Marcom writing, training, and tech pubs analysis and consulting.

Web: www.wordsisrael.com
Leah's email: leah@words.israel.net
Leah's phone: 054-485-3473
HQ (Akko, Israel): 04-981-4184