

The Importance of Correct Punctuation and Capitalisation

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This paper concerns the correct usage of English capitalisation and punctuation. Devised as a sort of guide or manual, it is primarily intended for ESL learners. It lists a set of basic rules, as well as the accompanying examples, in order to facilitate their acquisition and to draw attention to the significance of the correct application of these rules since the failure to properly capitalise letters, omit, or to properly employ punctuation marks destroys the structure of the text and may lead to miscommunication between the writer and the reader, i.e., prevent the information from being properly conveyed, and your goals being properly met. Consequently, correct capitalisation and punctuation is an indispensable language tool in academic and scientific settings.

KEY WORDS

- ~ Capitalisation
- ~ Punctuation
- ~ Rules
- ~ Writing

1. INTRODUCTION

With the dawn of cutting-edge communication technology, the Internet slang, the SMS, and other novelties, the fundamental aspects of English punctuation and capitalisation, for years considered indispensable and essential to any intelligible and literate written communication, have almost sunk into oblivion. Not only does the failure to observe the basic rules, governing the correct use of capitalisation and punctuation, deprive the writer of properly expressing his thoughts, ideas and intentions, but it also mirrors the writer's professional profile and competence in general.

The ever decreasing awareness of the importance of correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation seems to be ubiquitous or, as some would prefer, global, and is certainly not limited to the correct usage of the English language – these tendencies may be observed in other languages as well, Croatian being no exception. There are apparently fewer and fewer people who still believe that a good command of spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation belongs to what may be called basic literacy, undoubtedly and infallibly indicating the person's educational, intellectual, and civilisation level, therefore extremely important and definitely worth an effort, to say the very least. On the other hand, there is, regrettably, an ever-increasing number of those who tend to dismiss these issues as unimportant, insubstantial, even a waste of time – more the pity that not a negligible number may be found among those who like to think of themselves as educated and enlightened, if not sophisticated. All things considered, one would not go too far in saying that the entire world seems to be heading towards illiteracy.

As has been said before, much of the problem may be attributed to the advent of modern communication technology (the internet, mobile telephones, etc.) where questions of style do not seem to matter – they have been long abandoned as superfluous or an indication of boring and useless pedantry

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and would-be hypercorrectness that, with their 'unreasonable' demands, stand in the way of unimpeded communication. An overall neglect and carelessness are ever present and may be observed literally everywhere: in personal notes, letters, messages, primarily e-mails and other forms of electronic communication, as well as on billboards, shop-windows (even bookshops and libraries!), advertisements, TV-commercials, etc. It is for these very reasons why this problem needs to be addressed, drawing the attention of potential users of English, in our case the ESL students, primarily in higher education, but also all those who still believe in the proper, coherent, and literate use of Standard English.

In the reading process, capitalisation draws our attention to proper nouns such as names, places, time, addresses, at the same time amplifying the significance of keywords in the text. Punctuation, on the other hand, aids the reader to assimilate the thought expressed through the written word. There are no new sentences without a period, pauses without a comma, a change of thought without a dash, or additional information without brackets. Another writer tells us that punctuation marks are the traffic signals of language: they tell us to slow down, notice this, take a detour, and stop (Truss, 2005). Discussing the comma, Truss urges the writer to be aware of its potential ambiguity by giving a few examples where commas have been obviously misplaced, thereby obfuscating the meaning, causing confusion, and frequently resulting not only in misunderstanding, but in utter nonsense.

- (1) Leonora walked on her head, a little higher than usual.
- (2) The driver managed to escape from the vehicle before it sank and swam to the river-bank.

In the first example, the comma is to follow the preposition "on", otherwise the sentence would be meaningless, if not ludicrous, while the second example suggests that the vehicle swam to the river-bank, rather than the passenger. In this instance, the comma is to follow the past form of the verb "to sink", i.e., "sank"(Truss, 2005). The quoted sentences exemplify the consequences of mispunctuation which, surprisingly, even educated native speakers seem to be prone to, and, more often than not, in two minds about proper capitalisation, let alone the ESL learners. This paper is intended for the ESL learners as it concerns the proper usage of capitalisation and punctuation in order to help them properly convey information through the written word in terms of clarity and, ultimately, readability.

Since this paper has been primarily intended for the Croatian ESL students, and the problems discussed above are evident in the Croatian language as well, it might be useful here to mention, as far as written language is concerned, some problem areas due to an interaction between the two languages and possible confusion resulting from it.

Firstly, some of the punctuation marks, the colon and the semi-colon for instance, abundantly occurring in English written texts, are not as frequently used in Croatian. This might need some additional clarification in terms of making the students aware of this fact and encouraging them to use these punctuation marks wherever they are required, or wherever the particular situation calls for it.

The second problem is the one of capitalisation. Not only has it been almost completely eradicated by modern usage, primarily due to the design of book-titles, headings, captions, film posters, advertisements, etc., where capitals do not seem to figure at all – they are put (and omitted!) liberally and arbitrarily, almost at random, disregarding all rules and conventions of correct spelling. This has resulted in more and more people, especially the young ones, regarding the rules of writing as an unnecessary burden. Capitalisation in this respect needs particular attention since it considerably differs in the two languages (English and Croatian). It is also a segment in which the interaction and interference between the two languages becomes evident and actually goes two ways. In Croatian the separate segments of titles (books, films, etc.) are not capitalised, whereas in English they are. Also, the adjectives derived from proper nouns denoting nations and nationalities (Croatian, English, German, French, etc.) are always capitalised in English, while in Croatian they are not. Consequently, the most common mistakes arise from this, making Croatian students unnecessarily (and incorrectly!) capitalise the words in Croatian titles, while omitting the obligatory capitals in adjectives denoting nationalities and, conversely, using them in Croatian (e.g. *english, french, italian vs. *Engleski, *Francuski, *Talijanski').

Furthermore, the punctuation mark deserving particular attention and consideration is undoubtedly the apostrophe, hardly if ever used in Croatian (apart from the rare cases where it indicates contraction (elision or omission). In English, however, the apostrophe is extremely important because, apart from indicating elision in contracted forms of primary and modal auxiliary verbs (it's, isn't, aren't, can't, won't, etc.), it is also a mark of the possessive case (Paul's, Mary's, the Westons' house, children's, etc.), i.e., it has an important morphological and grammatical function which in no circumstances can be disregarded, not even for the sake of brevity and economy. Due to the failure to recognise this, the mistakes of this type are becoming increasingly frequent, sadly, not only among the non-native speakers of English:

***Its** a lovely day!

***Childrens'** toys sold here.

*He bought some **CD's, record's** and **tape's** at a sale.

Naturally, when it comes to correct spelling and punctuation, many areas in the two languages are similar, if not identical: the cases where one would normally use a comma, an exclamation mark, or a full-stop, for instance, are perfectly compatible in both languages and foreign students of English can be comfortable and confident in using them properly. It is the areas where there are significant differences and departures that require more attention and care. In other words, in a paper of this type, particular emphasis should be laid upon the things that do not coincide in the two languages and where, in many respects, they considerably differ. It is also the aim of this paper to make the reader more aware of the differences in order to be able to adhere to the rules of proper spelling and punctuation, which, in our opinion, is still of utmost importance. It is a basic prerequisite for good writing, regardless of the register, all the more important when it comes to higher education and academic writing. Without a good command of the rules and standards, one could hardly aspire to achieve what is generally known as elementary literacy, let alone clarity, coherence, and elegance of style.

2. CAPITALISATION

Capital letters are employed to give emphasis to particular words, i.e. proper nouns and proper adjectives. This paper lists a number of rules and instances met daily.

2.1 Capitalise the first word of a sentence (a), of a direct quotation (b), and of a formally introduced series of items or phrases following a colon (c).

- (a) Always to be expressed in 360 degree notation from north (true north unless otherwise stated).
- (b) The captain said, "Fairway speed is...knots"
- (c) The analysis revealed the following: Carbon, six parts; oxygen; six parts.

2.2 Proper nouns, i.e., the names of particular people, countries, and cities are capitalised.

China

George Washington; but: the Washington family

Paris

Morocco

James

Cook

Venice

Italy

Walt Disney

Rome

2.3 Capitalise people's titles when they precede the name, or when the title is used alone instead of the name. In American English, people's titles are followed by a period (Ms., Mrs., Mr., Dr.). Shortened forms of capitalised titles normally have a period (Prof.), though this need not be so if the abbreviation ends with the last letter (Dr).

Mr Stewart

Dr Grey (Good morning, Doctor; but: She is a doctor).

Mrs Lincoln

President Kennedy

Ms Richardson

Queen Elizabeth II

Manager Smith

General Butler

Sir Edward (Can I help you, sir?)

Justice Roberts

2.4 Capitalise the d', da, della, van and von when not preceded by a title or forename.

De Maupassant; but: Guy de Maupassant

Von Tirpitz; but: Alfred von Tirpitz

Van Gogh; but: Vincent van Gogh

Della Robbia; but: Luca della Robbia

• In American and British names, these particles are usually capitalised, regardless of the said rule, but individual usage should be followed.

William De Morgan

Lucretia Van Zandt

Thomas De Quincey

Henry van Dyke (his own usage)

2.5 Capitalise the first sentence in a letter after the initial greeting, followed by either a comma (BrE, informal AmE) or a colon (AmE).

Dear Mr. Smith:

Dear Mr. Smith,

Following your notification of...

Following your notification of...

2.6 Capitalise words for members of a family when they precede a name, or are used alone instead of a name. These titles are not capitalised when they are preceded by possessive adjectives.

Uncle Paul; but: visit his uncle

a letter to Mother; but: I wrote to my mother

Aunt Barbara; but: visit her aunt
yes, **F**ather; but: he hasn't got a **f**ather

2.7 Words derived from proper nouns that retain a proper meaning are capitalised.

Chinese
Parisian
Disneyesque

American
Venetian
Disneyish

Moroccan
Roman
Disneyfication

2.8 Words that derive from proper nouns that are used as common nouns are set lowercased.

roman (type)
macadam (crushed rock, dirt road)
frankfurter (meat)

brussels sprout (vegetable)
watt (electric unit)
china (crocker)

venetian blinds (window covering)
plaster of **p**aris (gypsum plaster)
scotch (drink)

2.9 Common nouns and adjectives which are part of a proper name, such as streets, buildings, and geographical names need be capitalised.

Elm **S**treet,
Empire **S**tate **B**uilding
Red **R**iver

Sandy **L**ane
Port **A**uthority **B**uilding
Biscayne **B**ay

Lincoln **A**venue
Chrysler **B**uilding
Mount **S**t. **H**elens.

2.10 Descriptive place references are never capitalised.

the **v**alley of the Nile,
the **r**iver Thames,
the **g**orge of the Colorado

2.11 Common nouns used alone as a substitute for the name of a place are not capitalised.

Hoover **D**am; the **d**am
Statue of **L**iberty; the statue
Washington **C**ity; but: the city of Washington; the city
Cook **C**ounty; the county

Washington **M**onument; the monument
Cape **H**orn; the cape

2.12. Should an intervening common noun separate a common noun or adjective that forms an essential part of the name, then the expression is not considered a proper name and is therefore not capitalised.

Union **S**tation: union **p**assenger station
Eastern **S**tates: eastern **f**arming states

2.13 If a common noun is used alone to refer to a well-known proper noun, it is capitalised.

The **C**hannel (the **E**nglish **C**hannel)
The **C**hunnel (tunnel below the **E**nglish **C**hannel)
The **D**istrict (**D**istrict of **C**olumbia)

2.14 The plural form of a common noun preceding or following a proper noun is capitalised as well.

Lakes **E**rie and **O**ntario
Presidents **W**ashington and **A**dams

State and **T**reasury **D**epartments
the **P**otomac and **J**ames **R**ivers

2.15 Capitalise a noun followed by a number or a letter that indicates sequence, the nouns chart and table mentioned in the text and followed by numerals, as well as nouns followed by a number to name a section of a book or legal code.

Account 1220
Article 2
Room 101

Act 2
Book IV
Figure 5

Appendix B
Chapter 6
Table 6

• Exceptions: line, note, page, paragraph, size, step.

2.16 The following terms are never capitalised, even with a name or number:

aqueduct
buoy
ditch
floodway
lock
slip
tunnel
watershed

breakwater
dike
drydock
jetty
pier
spillway
wharf
weir

2.17 The following common nouns are always capitalised when they form a proper name:

(Kornati) **A**rchipelago
(Blaca) **D**esert
(Dalmatina) **H**ighway
(Istra) **P**eninsula

(Savudrija) **B**ay
(Plitvice) **F**alls
(Marjan) **H**ill
(Colorado) **P**lateau

(Carpenters) **B**ayou
(Marča) **F**orest
(Sechelt) **I**nlet
(Krka) **R**iver

(Queens) **B**orough
(Dobra) **F**ork
(Island) of **H**var
(Adriatic) **S**ea
(Panama) **C**anal
Fort (**K**lis)
(British) **I**sles
(Puget) **S**ound

(Cetina River) **C**anyon
(Vratnik) **G**ap
(Sit) **I**slet
(Glenwood) **S**prings

Cape (**K**amenjak)
(Hubbard) **G**lacier
(Red) **L**ake
(Neretva) **V**alley

(Brač) **C**hannel
(Zrmanja) **G**ulch
Mount (**P**apuk)

(Split-Dalmatia) **C**ounty
(Gulf) of **M**exico
(Biokovo) **M**ountain

(Medveščak) **C**reek
(Split) **H**arbuor
(Tacoma) **N**arrows

2.18 Definite article in proper place nouns

In English most countries and cities do not take the definite article, but some do. The definite article is capitalised when it is used as part of an official name or title.

The Dalles (OR); but the Dalles region
The Gambia

The Hague
British Council v. The Mermaid (court case)

- The definite article is not capitalised when it is used adjectively, i.e. when the state's name it precedes derives from a geographical reference, such as mountainous region, river, etc.

the **C**ongo
the **N**etherlands
the **L**ebanon
the Second Hague Conference

the **S**udan
the **P**hilippines
the **H**ague **C**ourt
the **S**ahara

2.19 Capitalise the names of organised bodies and their members to distinguish them from the common meaning, as well as the names of organisations, associations, institutions, etc.

Republican **P**arty, a **R**epublican; a republican (one who believes in a republican form of government).

First **N**ational **B**ank
the **N**ational **B**asketball **A**ssociation
the **U**S **A**rmy

2.20 Capitalise territory, state, nation, union, and empire only when these words refer to a particular political division.

the **U**nited **S**tates: the **R**epublic, the **N**ation, the **U**nion;
but: a **r**epublic, a **n**ation, a **u**nion.

the **B**ritish **E**mpire: the **E**mpire; but: an empire, South Africa;
but: countries of **s**outhern **A**frica, the **W**est; but: he drove **e**ast

2.21 Descriptive terms related to a definite geographical region or feature need be capitalised.

the **F**ar **E**ast
the **C**ontinental **D**ivide
the **S**outh **P**ole

the **N**ear **E**ast
the **N**orth **P**ole
the **W**estern **H**emisphere

2.22 Capitalise names of months and days of the year, historic events, eras, holidays, and ecclesiastical feast, fast days, all nouns and adjectives denoting the Deity, and all pronouns referring to the same.

January
Friday
World **W**ar
Middle **A**ges
Renaissance
Allah
Shrove **T**uesday
the **L**ord
the **V**irgin
Son of **M**an
the **H**oly **G**host
Fourth of **J**uly
Yahweh
the **A**lmighty

2.23 All names of creeds, religious bodies, and their adherents must be capitalised.

Christian
Buddhist

Methodist **C**hurch
Mohammedan

2.24 Capitalise the first and all the important words in the English title of a book, poem, play, essay, work of art, piece of music, report, publication (paper), court case, film, television programme, headlines in newspapers, etc.

The **W**ave: In **P**ursuit of the **R**ogues, **F**reaks, and **G**iants of the **O**cean (book)

The **R**ime of the **A**ncient **M**ariner (poem)

Mutiny on the **B**ounty (film)

The **R**aft of the **M**edusa (painting)

Brown v. **B**oard of **E**ducation (court case)

• Little words (articles, conjunctions) within titles such as a, an, the, but, or, nor, as well as prepositions (to, from, on, etc.) are set lowercased.

3. PUNCTUATION

3.1 The comma (,)

The comma is used in writing to separate parts of a sentence showing a slight pause in the interest of clarity and ease of reading.

3.1.1 A comma is used between each element of pairs and series unless the pairs are connected by a coordinating conjunction.

- (a) The voyage was interesting, eventful.
- (b) The voyage was interesting and eventful.

3.1.2 A comma is used before the conjunction and in a series of a, b, and c.

When latitude and longitude are used, these shall be expressed in degrees, minutes, and decimals of a minute (if necessary).

3.1.3 A comma is used before the conjunctions (and, for, or, neither, nor) when they join a pair of main clauses.

- (a) They will be there, or I am mistaken.
- (b) Many are called, but few are chosen.

3.1.4 A comma is used to introduce a short, direct quotation in the form of a complete sentence and at the end of a quotation if it is followed by unquoted remarks. If the quoted sentence is long, a direct quotation can be followed by a colon.

- (a) The captain replied, "The creature is made of wood."
- (b) "The creature is made of wood", replied the captain.
- (c) "The creature", replied the captain, "is made of wood."

3.1.5 A comma is used before and after such elements as for example, to be sure, however, nevertheless, and therefore, when they are used parenthetically.

- (a) Any offshore structure, in fact, may present a hazard to navigation.
- (b) The vessel will, therefore, proceed from harbour at six o'clock.

3.1.6 A comma is used to enclose a geographical name explaining a preceding geographical name.

- (a) They lived in Split, Dalmatia, for a number of years.

3.1.7 A comma is used to enclose a date explaining a preceding date.

- (a) In January, 1978, they moved to Zagreb.
(b) On January 29, they decided to leave Zagreb.

3.1.8 A comma is used between the parts of a name or phrase when they are written in reverse order.

Cook, James
Punctuation, Use of

Navigation, History of
Chemistry, Organic

3.1.9 A comma is used to enclose appositives.
Christopher Columbus, a fearless and dedicated explorer, grew up surrounded by the sea, ships, and sailors.

3.1.10 A comma is used to enclose absolute phrases.
Six boys came over the hill half an hour early that afternoon, running hard, their heads down, their forearms working, their breath whistling.

3.1.11 A comma is used to separate two words or figures in order to avoid confusion.

- (a) In 1564, 23 Spanish ships were lost in Florida waters.
(b) To Katharine, Spencer was the best actor of all times.
(c) What will be, will be.

3.1.12 Use a comma before the abbreviations or degrees.

Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.
Christian Barnard, M.D.
Rudolf Filipović, Ph.D.

3.1.13 A comma is used to separate thousands, millions, billions in numbers of four or more digits.

8, 293
87, 312
8, 856, 345

• A comma is not used in telephone numbers, serial numbers, dates, and radio wave lengths.

Pacific Heights 6548
A.D. 2011
No. C83600854 K
1170 kilocycles; 325 meters

3.1.14. A comma is used after a title or phrase in direct address.

- (a) Sir, we are ready to proceed.
(b) Mr. President, we are waiting for your instructions.

3.1.15 Use a comma between title and name of organisation where “of” or “of the” has been omitted.

Rector, University of Split
President, Board of Directors

The comma has an important syntactic function: it is more than merely a punctuation mark because the overall meaning frequently depends on its proper use (or its omission).

The comma is used in complex sentences to separate the sentence elements (clauses).

If the main clause precedes the subordinate clause(s), no comma is used:

You must tell me all about it when you come back.
Give me a ring if you should see anything unusual.

If, however, the subordinate clause precedes the main clause, i.e., the clause sequence is inverted, it is separated from it by a comma:

As soon as I have time, I'll deal with it.
If you happen to see Jack, give him my regards.

The importance of the use of the comma (or its omission) becomes even more prominent in **relative clauses**, marking the distinction between **defining** (restrictive) and **non-defining** (non-restrictive) relative clauses.

In **defining relative clauses** the comma is omitted:

His brother **who lives in London** is an artist.

The omission of the commas in the above sentence indicates that the person has more than one brother, therefore the inserted clause determines which brother is meant, i.e., the one who lives in London.

Should, however, the commas be used, as in:

His brother, **who lives in London**, is an artist.

it would clearly imply that the inserted relative clause is not vital to the meaning: it merely contains a piece of additional information (the person has only one brother). The relative clause is in this case considered to be **non-defining** (non-restrictive).

After which, used as the sentential relativiser, the comma is obligatory. In this case, the relative sentence introduced by **which** refers to the whole previous clause:

We have received no reply to our proposal, **which** is quite surprising.

The unemployment rates are on the increase, **which** was only to be expected.

3.2 The Dash (-), the hyphen (-), and the slash (/)

The dash is used to introduce short sentence elements and has great force. It should be used only when other forms of punctuation are inadequate.

3.2.1 Use a dash instead of a semicolon (;) when more effective grouping is desired.

The shouting ceased – all was quiet; evidently the mob had dispersed.

3.2.2 Use a dash if you want put an emphasis on a word or group of words following it.

He works hard – too hard, in fact.

3.2.3 Use a dash at the end of a long series to introduce material concerning that series.

With his persistence, with his positive attitude, with his determination – with all these, John should not fail.

3.2.4 Use a dash to link letters, figures, years, days, months or letters and figures combined.

DO – X
AB – 3
1948 – 50
February – June
Monday – Friday

3.2.5 Use a dash when there is repetition for additional emphasis.

We are now in financial trouble – the trouble that will cost us hundreds of jobs.

3.2.6 Use a dash for summarising.

(a) John, Dean, Peter, James – all knew the solution to the problem.

3.2.7 A hyphen is used to join part of a word at the end of one line with the other part which is continued on the next line. Divide a word by syllables, or the smaller units from which the

word is constructed (prefixes such as un-, dis-, im-in-, and suffixes such as -able, -ible, -ful, -fully, -less, etc.).

- (a) He was trying to chat up this girl, but you could see from her face that she was in- **different (next line)**.
- (b) Perspicuity and beauty of composi- tion (next line) are not to be sneezed at in this rotten world.

3.2.8 A hyphen is used with compound adjectives preceding a noun (in the attributive position) (a), with a verb preceding an adjective (b) or adverb (c), with a verb preceding a preposition (d), with a past participle construction before a noun (e), as well as with a noun (f1), adjective (f2), or adverb (f3) preceding a present participle.

- (a) round-table discussion
- (b) feel-good factor
- (c) buy-now pay-later purchase
- (f) stick-on label
- (e) middle-aged lady
- (f) (f1) awe-inspiring personality
- (f2) long-lasting affair
- (f3) far-reaching decision

However, the hyphen is omitted in the compound adjectives predicatively used:

We felt that the decision was **far reaching**.

3.2.9 A hyphen is used with prefixes.

A pre-war house
Non-nuclear sources
A self-employed builder
Good co-operation

3.2.10 A hyphen is used with numbers spelled out or as numerals.

Two-thirds of the population
Twenty-three
Five-sided polygon
20th century-poem

3.2.11 A hyphen is used with pairs of adjectives and nouns, as well as compounds including two geographical modifiers.

French-Spanish dictionary
Afro-Cuban
Father-son relationship
Anglo-Indian

• **Slash mark** is also called the **stroke** or **oblique** (BrE).

3.2.12 Use a slash mark instead of the conjunction “or”.
Payment by cash /cheque /credit card only.

3.2.13 Use a slash mark to show that two expressions have the same meaning.

Add 80z / 225g sugar and bake at 200° C / 400°F.

3.2.14 Use a slash mark to separate the numbers when writing dates.

(BrE) 22 / 5 / 65 (22 May 1965)

(AmE) 12 / 4 / 83 (December 4 1983)

3.2.15 A slash mark is used instead of for each (spoken per or a) with amounts and prices.

My car does not use much petrol. It does about 40 miles/gallon.

Car rental at \$50 /day

3.3 The Semi-colon (;)

The semi-colon is used in formal writing between two parts of a sentence, usually when each of the two parts could form grammatical sentences of their own, i.e., to coordinate main clauses.

3.3.1 Use the semi-colon between main clauses which are not connected by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, or, neither, nor).

Rachel's eyes began to close; Dan, too, was feeling tired.

3.3.2 Use the semi-colon between pairs of main clauses when a conjunctive adverb (therefore, nevertheless, however, otherwise) is present.

You may help him; however, I will not.

3.3.3 Use the semi-colon with a coordinating conjunction if such clauses are long, contain commas, or if emphasis is desired.

It is not just to the people, the state, or the country; and although difficult, a proper decision must be made.

3.4 The Colon (:)

3.4.1 The colon is used to introduce a clause or phrase that explains a preceding clause.

(a) We have made a difficult decision: the company will close.

(b) We live on a planet, not on a star: a star is a sun.

3.4.2 The colon is used to introduce a direct, lengthy quotation, or any other formal matter.

(a) The captain explained: "When the position is related to a mark, the mark shall be a well-defined charted object. The bearing shall be in the 360 degree notation from true north and shall be that of the position from the mark."

(b) These are his intrinsic motivations: personal growth and development; doing a good job; leading and organising others; and finding meanings from his efforts.

3.4.3 The colon is used to express time.

9:30 A.M. 12:30 P.M.

3.4.4 The colon is used after the salutation of a letter.

Dear Madam:

Dear Sir:

My dear Sir:

Gentleman:

3.4.5 The colon is used in proportions.

1:3 : :3:9 The ratio was 16:1.

3.5 Round brackets (BrE) / Parentheses (AmE)

3.5.1 Use round brackets to enclose part of a sentence intended to be read as a side remark, given the removal of such part would not destroy the context. Complete sentences, intended as side remarks, may be given in round brackets.

Robert was playing great football (for the thrill of it; not merely to win). I'll see you on Tuesday (I can't come tomorrow, I am just too busy).

3.5.2 Use round brackets in reference to tables, diagrams, charts, and to enclose figures or letters used in enumerations.

(a) Small business credit conditions depend on recovery in residential construction (see Chart I).

(b) (1) Insert a cassette. (2) Press the PLAY and RECORD buttons.

3.6 Square brackets

Square brackets are used in specialised writing, for example, textbooks. They are rarely, if ever, used in a business letter.

3.6.1 Use square brackets to enclose an explanatory remark in a quoted passage.

"The rise of absolutism [Fascism, Hitlerism, etc.] has its roots in post-war conditions," the speaker said.

3.7 Quotation marks

Quotation marks may be single (' ') and double (" "). Some writers prefer to use double quotation marks only to enclose words that were spoken.

3.7.1 Use quotation marks to enclose all direct quotations. He said, "I am manoeuvring with difficulty. Keep clear of me."

3.7.2 Use single quotation marks to enclose a quotation within a quotation.

Tom said: "I heard one of the passenger say, 'The ship is listing to starboard.'"

3.7.3 The comma and period are always placed inside the quotation marks.

“I will join you,” she said, “if you want me to.”

3.8 The period (A.E) / The full stop (B.E.) (.)

3.8.1 Use the period at the end of a declarative sentence.
This ship will be built in our shipyard.

3.8.2 Use the period at the end of an imperative sentence.
Do not pass astern of me.

3.8.3 Use the period after an indirect question.
I asked him how it felt to see such a famous person.

3.8.4 Use the period after an abbreviation.
e.g. (for example)
etc. (and so forth)
i.e. (that is)

• A contraction (indicated by an apostrophe) is not followed by a period.

Ass'n (association)
M'g'r (manager)
Sup't (superintendent)
Assn.
Mgr.
Supt.

3.8.5 Do not use a period after Roman numerals except in enumeration used in an outline.

Elizabeth II
I. The Colonial Period Henry VIII
II. The Ante-Bellum Period
III. The Post-Bellum Period

3.8.6 Use the period within quotation marks.
He did not see the performance „Mourning Becomes Electra.“

3.9 The exclamation mark (!)

3.9.1 Use the exclamation mark at the end of a declarative sentence or after an exclamation within the sentence to convey the idea of strong feeling, surprise, or irony.

- (a) Here, get down from there!
- (b) What! the only one we have! and I am not to use it!

3.10 The question mark

3.10.1 Use the question mark at the end of an interrogative sentence.

- (a) How much money did you spend yesterday?

- (b) “How much money did you spend yesterday?” he asked.

3.10.2 Use the question mark when it is desirable to emphasize each element separately.

Who is responsible for executing the plan? the coach? the coaching staff? the players?

• Sometimes a question will actually end with a series of brief questions. When these brief questions are just follow-ups to the main question, each of the short questions can begin with a lowercase letter and end with a question mark (see exclamation mark **3.9.1**).

3.11 The apostrophe (')

3.11.1 The apostrophe is used to indicate the omission of one or more letters from a verb, or figures from a number.

- (a) We're (we are) his parents.
- (b) It's their decision (it is).
- (c) They've lived (have lived) in Split since 1975.
- (d) The class of '75 met at the Marjan Hotel.

• Do not use an apostrophe with the possessive determiner *its*.

Split and **its** surroundings.

3.11.2 The apostrophe is used to show possession with nouns not ending in an -s, with plural nouns ending in an -s, compound nouns, as well as with indefinite pronouns.

the girl's book, the children's bedroom
my brother-in-law's car

a girls' school, the Smiths' house
somebody else's coat

3.11.3 Use the apostrophe and s to form the possessive of singular nouns of not more than one syllable, including those which end in an -s.

Fred's
James's
Mr. Jones's

• With the possessive of singular nouns ending in an -s, the 's is preferable.

3.11.4 Use the apostrophe alone with the possessive of plural nouns ending in an -s, but add an apostrophe with plural nouns which do not end in an -s.

sailors' wages
the Taylors' property
women's fashions

3.11.5 Use the apostrophe and an -s to indicate compound possession.

John and Anthony's parents.

3.11.6 Use the apostrophe and an -s to form the plural of a letter, a figure, a word used as a noun, or to indicate a decade.

- (a) No more if's and but's.
- (b) There are three 7's in your equation instead of two.
- (c) I liked the fashion of the roaring 20's.

In the plural of numerals the apostrophe is optional; therefore it is also possible to write **20s**.

4. CONCLUSION

Since it is virtually impossible to give a comprehensive list of rules on this occasion, this paper's primary objective is to pinpoint a set of basic rules of capitalisation and punctuation, along with the accompanying examples, thereby providing the ESL students with a basis and a starting point for considering the issues presented and discussed, as well as to raise their sensitivity to and awareness of the relevant issues. The correct application of these rules is of the essence in formal writing, particularly in academic and scientific milieus. As this outline is not exhaustive, neither has it been its aim, the correct usage can be determined by analogy or application of the rules, by common sense, as well as by looking up other examples in textbooks, manuals, and dictionaries.

Furthermore, this brief guide is expected to encourage and motivate the ESL students, as non-native speakers and writers of English, to pay more attention to these issues and to make an effort to improve their spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation – their writing style in general.

In the present circumstances, where good writing style is practically on the verge of extinction, with fewer and fewer people giving more than a passing thought to issues such as these, and where illiteracy seems to be unstoppably spreading everywhere, encroaching even upon the academic territory (which does not seem to be immune to it), it is all the more important to warn of the pending danger. It is to be hoped that, in however small a way, this paper will make a contribution towards this goal.

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