

Punctuation: Its Indispensable Impact on Academic Writing Skills

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Abstract—Writing is one of the effective ways of communication. Writing legacy in Academics is unavoidable. The efficacy of writing depends on different mechanics of language. Punctuation is the primary physical attire of every written form that makes the written text understandable. The various punctuation marks deliver varied meanings in writing. The necessity of nonverbal cues can be met through punctuation. Focus on punctuation leads to better understanding, that helps to shoot issues of complex vocabulary. Knowledge in the right usage of punctuation defeat cultural differences in language use. Punctuation that is wrongly placed and poorly used may lead to misconception in the official documentation. Grammatical issues also take help of punctuation marks and deliver apt information. The present paper focuses on the importance of punctuation marks in the written communication, the various types, their usage and certain myths in the usage etc. Finally, it provides information related to usage of punctuation in the formal letter writing and report writing. Many often-confused marks are to be discussed in detail. It concludes with the findings that well punctuated text can convince the reader and can be understood effectively.

Index Terms—Communication, formal letter writing skills, placement of punctuation, punctuation marks, report writing, writing mechanics, writing skills

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a vital role in social and personal life of every person. As per the required context different forms of communication would meet the need. Writing is one of the effective means of communication. Well written text preserves a lasting bond between writer and the reader. Graham and Perin (2007) state that writing is a skill that draws on the use of strategies (such as Planning, evaluating, and revising text) to accomplish a variety of goals, such as

writing a report or expressing an opinion with the support of evidence. The writing efficacy is based on the different dynamics of writing like, syntax, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, format etc. Among this punctuation is one. As Crystal (2003) state punctuation plays a critical role in the modern writing system, yet its significance is regularly understood. Every written text needs to be well punctuated for the better understanding of the reader. The expected pauses and the given breaks may demand right punctuation. There are many punctuation marks few of them were accommodated for the understanding of the reader. These marks would make the writers effective in communication.

II. IMPORTANCE OF PUNCTUATION MARKS

The communication that depends on writing skills always demands accuracy and preciseness where punctuation ensure the required efficacy. "They are signals to the reader that indicate pause, place emphasis, alter the function or show the relationship between the elements of the text." (Jane, 2008:122) In the written language the importance of punctuation is without any doubt. It makes reader comfortable while reading. Wrong placement of punctuation marks may mislead the meaning of the text. Sometimes the experienced writers are found to be struck in the placement of few punctuation marks. These punctuation marks have the power to indicate many nonverbal signals like expression of wonder, surprise, making enquiry, doubt in understanding, defining a term, giving substitute information, stress on particular part of message etc. The present paper focuses on different punctuation marks and their usage in the written text. It also presents the facts about how do they help in understanding the cultural differences in

writing. It further presents useful information about the use of punctuation marks in letter writing and report writing.

III. DIFFERENT PUNCTUATION MARKS AND THEIR UNIQUE USAGE

There are many punctuation marks in writing skills but few of them are important and frequently used. The placement of punctuation marks and their meaning is important for every writer and reader.

a. Comma (,)

i) It is one of the important short pauses, used commonly in the written text. It is used to separate subordinate clause from main clause in a complex sentence

Ex: My father's job was very tough, but he enjoys working

ii) It is used to separate a list of items

Ex: My brother went to market to bring vegetables, fruits, oil and other groceries

iii) It is used to separate phrases in apposition

Ex: In spite of my talent, I was asked to quit the game

iv) It occurs after a discourse marker

Ex: Secondly, my sister was a great painter too.

b) Full Stop (.) It is used for long pauses and to indicate the completion of sentences

i) Every independent and complete sentence will be ended with a full stop

Ex: I went to college to write my examination

ii) Abbreviations carry them between and among the letters

Ex: U.N.O

iii) It helps to separate Initial or surname from the main name

Ex: Sailaja

c) Colon (:) It is a very useful punctuation mark that has different uses

i) To define a particular term or acronym

Ex: Computer: An electronic device

ii) To introduce a list of items

Ex: Ingredients: Sugar, coffee powder, milk, a glass of water

iii) To propose a quotation

Ex: He says: 'persistence with hard work gives success'

d) Semi-colon (;) It indicates a short break in the same sentence, when it is part of the sentence but presents an allied concept of the main sentence.

i) to indicate an internal separation of the same sentence

Ex: Alexander came; he saw; he conquered

ii) The various clauses of conjunctive adverbs can be separated with semi colon

Ex: We shouldn't go to the fair; however, I do hear that they have good funnel cakes

iii) The related clauses of the same sentence can be separated with a semi colon

Ex: I am very proud of your success; by all means you are my happiness

e) Quotation Marks (“”)

There are two types of quotation marks, they are used to emphasise on the important words.

To show the importance of a particular word

Ex: He is 'the Shakespeare' of our college

To separate title, awards or names of the books from the rest of the sentence

Ex: He is the author of 'Rich dad poor Dad'

To highlight the importance of a particular action word from rest of the text

Ex: The way he 'communicates' never fails at anybody

f) Apostrophe (')

i) It is used for omission of letter in a word contraction

Ex: I won't be able to attend today meeting

ii) It is used to show belongingness and mark the possessive case

Ex: My brother's job is stationery

iii) It is used in the expression of time

Ex: It's already 7'o clock

g) Exclamatory Mark (!)

It is also used as ending mark for sentences but the sentences which are framed to express strong emotions carry this mark.

It is used at the end of an exclamatory sentences that are framed to express surprise, wonder, sorrow etc

Ex: What a wonderful climate it is!

To add an emphasis on certain adjectives but the mark is used at the end of the sentence

Ex: The garden I saw at Mysore is excellent!

h) Question Mark (?)

It is an end mark used for sentences of enquiry and interrogation

Every direct question ends with question mark

Ex: How about you?

Every question Tag ends with question Mark

Ex: Are you staying with your parents, aren't you?

g) Hyphen (-)

It is a mark that is useful to indicate either internal separation in the words or combination of different parts of speech

1. To indicate separation of prefix from the main word

Ex: Co-operative

2. To indicate combination of word parts in a compound word

Ex: brother-in-law

h) Parentheses (())

They are brackets used to provide additional information

1. To provide addition information like meanings, time of action, intext citation, expanded forms of acronyms etc.

Ex: My parents asked me to take an gold ornament (22k) as a gift to my sister

2. Some non-essential information can be provided just to create awareness

Ex: There are public holidays (Sundays also) to do some house hold work

3. Dash (---)

There are two types of dash are in use

Em- dash is used to indicate a break Ex: My father took me to hotel -to celebrate my birthday

En dash is used to indicate a range Ex: I bought three pens – for my brother, sister and me

IV. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN PUNCTUATION

Language is the essence of communication of all corners of the world. It has been identified as effective means. Language writing is significant in every field society. But the sentence structures, word order and vocabulary differ. Punctuation also used in vivid form as it is observed in many languages across the world. Now the world has been treated as a small village and the concept of communication is a distinct factor in uniting the whole universe. In this context understanding about usage of punctuation marks in few of the known languages would benefit the global professionals in presenting appropriate text to meet their professional needs. The following information mark some of the differences in the punctuation used by few known language natives

- In English and French to separate the parts of any sentence we use commas (,) and semicolons (;). They indicate short pause and break in sentences.

But in German they use dashes (-) and Colons (:)

to indicate the same.

- The existence of ambiguity can be reflected through punctuation marks. In English we use punctuation marks like question marks and exclamatory marks for the existent ambiguity and ambivalence. But in Germany we should reverse these marks like (;) and Exclamatory marks (!)
- Across languages significant differences can be visible in the usage of quotation marks (“”). We use these marks to understand importance of certain part of the information (“”).
- In English we use ellipses (...) to supply the meaning like short pauses and trailing thoughts in the conversation. But in Japan it indicates omission of words and letter in the sentence.
- Because punctuation plays a vital role in conveying tone and emotions, language translators should be keen in translating the accurate meaning of the texted information.

V. MYTHS IN THE USAGE OF PUNCTUATION

The usage of punctuation is a complex affair for many undergraduate learners. There is ambiguity in the usage. Hence the myths are to be clarified through to make the usage more effective in writing skills.

Certain punctuation marks are used less frequently but for very important purposes, they are colon, semicolon and single inverted commas and apostrophe. Many writing articles carry these punctuation marks for an important place. Simultaneously both readers and writers indulge in a dilemma to place them correctly. The following myths need fact-based evidences to make the authors and readers confident about their use.

- Myth: Always there should be a colon whenever a list of items is introduced

Fact: List of items can be vertical and horizontal. Only when a separate space is taken in the article to introduce a list of items vertically then colon can be used, but frequently a list can be introduced by using discourse markers

Example: My father sent me five birthday gifts. They are mini purse, umbrella, sweet box, mobile pouch and cooling glasses.

This colon can be used to introduce a famous saying or a quotation.

- Myth: Semi colon is must to separate each clause from other clause.
Fact: It is used for internal pause in a sentence. When both the parts of a sentence are connected to each other, then there is combined information, that can be separated by comma.
Example: He is a military doctor; he treats the soldiers with lot of care.
- Myth: Single inverted comma to be used for direct speech
Fact: Single inverted commas will be used to specify any titles or awards /key nouns/adjectives etc
Example A prime place is given for building a two bedroomed house, a pent house with a ‘pooja room’ inside.
The above myths can be changed as there are evidences to prove they are wrong.
The present focus on writing skills aims at quality writing.

VI. PUNCTUATION MARKS IN LETTER WRITING AND REPORT WRITING

Documentation is one of the important styles of writing. Every documented information has legal status. Punctuation marks are one of the supporting tools to understand even complex statements also in an easy way.

VII. LETTER WRITING AND REPORT WRITING -ROLE OF PUNCTUATION.

Letter writing and Report Writing are also important writing skill. Well placed punctuation marks in the formal letters would stand as symbols for right expression.

- A. Comma to be used after salutation
- B. Capital letter at the beginning of every sentence
- C. Additional information like years, dates, abbreviations, values can be kept in brackets. Secondary information can be written in brackets.
- D. Full stop suggests long pause
- E. Phrases and subordinate clauses also would be followed by a comma to tell the difference about a main expression and the rest

VIII. CONCLUSION

Writing has been one of the frequently tested skills in academics. It should be mastered, since major forms of communication proceeds in writing. Punctuation marks in writing skills acts like facial expression in spoken skills. The correct placement of punctuation marks makes the written text quite understandable wrong placement may lead to misconception.

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