



## Punctuation

### The apostrophe ‘

Apostrophes are used for two reasons- to show that:

- letters have been left out of a word (omitted letters)
- something belongs to, or is part of, something else (grammatical possession)

#### Omitted letters

Apostrophes are used to show where one or more letters have been removed (this is called a contraction):

don't	=	do not
didn't	=	did not
won't	=	will not
I'll	=	I will

**Note:** Contractions are not used in formal writing.

#### Grammatical possession

Possession means that one word belongs to, or is part of, another word. You can indicate possession by adding ‘s’ to the end of the word:

Vygotsky's theory  
Brown's approach

**Note:** “It's” means “it is” or “it has.” “Its” (without an apostrophe) means “belonging to it.”

It's been a difficult time.  
The organisation was shaken to its foundations.

#### Combining grammatical possession with plural words

If the word is plural (i.e., there are more than one), you usually add an ‘s’ without an apostrophe:

student	→	students
girl	→	girls

If you want to indicate possession at the same time (i.e., something belongs to more than one person, thing or situation), then simply add an apostrophe after the plural ‘s’:

the students' flat  
all the girls' uniforms

### **There is no need for an apostrophe in these situations:**

- in reference to decades. For example, the 1860s or the 1920s
- to indicate more than one of something (i.e., plural). For example, tomatoes, bananas
- when showing grammatical possession for pronouns. For example, ours, yours, hers, its

### **The semi-colon ;**

There are only two uses for the semi-colon:

- to separate two, grammatically complete, sentences
- to separate long list items that contain commas.

### **Separating sentences**

Semi-colons are used to separate sentences that are closely related in idea. Each sentence should be grammatically complete and it should be possible to replace the semi-colon with a full stop:

We all enjoy our flat; it has a great atmosphere.  
There are many benefits; there is also the disadvantage of lack of privacy.

### **Separating list items**

Semi-colons are also used to separate items in a list that are long, or contain commas:

There are many things on my 'to do list'. I need to run down to the bank to cash my cheque before 4pm; pick up my clothes from the drycleaners, unless they haven't finished cleaning them yet; and take the car to the car wash.

### **The colon :**

The colon is used to introduce something. What follows the colon can be a single word or a full sentence, but whatever comes before the colon should be a grammatically complete sentence. Whatever comes after the colon should explain, illustrate, or resolve what comes before the colon:

If you don't plan your assignment, you are setting yourself up for one thing: failure.

Colons are often used to introduce quotations or lists, or to separate a title or subtitle:

The theory was developed by Kozlov (1999, p. 22): "the optimum use of the resources is best described as using an adapted form of disbursement theory."

You only need a few basic ingredients to make scones: flour, baking powder, butter, and milk.

*Cell and molecular biology: Concepts and experiments*

## The ellipsis ...

The ellipsis (three dots) indicates that something has been deliberately left out of a quotation, to make it easier to read or to highlight the main points. Under most referencing systems, an ellipsis is only used when something has been omitted from the middle of the quotation, not the start or end:

According to Rice (1991, p. 17), “management... is a major component” of any profitable business.

**Note:** Sometimes you will see an ellipsis used at the end of a sentence to indicate ‘trailing off’ in thought. While this is fine in many forms of writing, this is inappropriate for academic writing.

## **Academic writing and study skills support**

### **1. Academic Q+A**

If you have a quick question about study skills or academic writing, then they can ask it on the [Academic Q+A forum](#), which can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

### **2. Consultations**

One-to-one consultations with learning advisors and writing consultants are [available online and on campus](#). Consultants can answer your questions about academic writing and study skills or give you feedback on your assignment’s structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, presentation, use of sources, and referencing.

### **3. Online Writing and Learning Link (OWLL)**

Develop your academic writing and study skills with the [Online Writing and Learning Link \(OWLL\)](#) from Massey University. OWLL includes information on assignment writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and exam skills.

### **4. Pre-reading Service**

The [Pre-reading Service](#) is a free service, which gives students s an opportunity to send their draft assignment to [CLS consultants](#) for review and advice. Students receive individual written feedback on their assignment’s structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, style, presentation, referencing, and use of sources. The service can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

### **5. Workshops**

Free study seminars and workshops are run on campus and online. See [Workshops page on OWLL](#) for [programmes and registration details](#).