

Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services

Punctuation in Business English (Part 1)

Apostrophe (')

How to use it: To show ownership

Examples: The department's secretary; the students' emotional well-being

How to use it: To indicate the plural of a lowercase word that may cause confusion

Example: There are no if's, and's, or but's about it.

Comma (,)

How to use it: Between words in a list

Example: The teacher bought pencils, construction paper, and tissues for her class.

Before and after an independent clause

Example: She planted a garden, using her own tools, outside the house.

Dashes: em dash (—) and en dash (–)

How to use em dash: To set off an enlightening statement in a sentence

Example: The technical programs of study—now available at 20 high schools—are good alternatives to traditional programs of study.

How to use en dash: To symbolize the word “through.” (Use with numbers.)

Example: She attended high school from 2009–2013. The program is from January 2013–May 2014.

Hyphen (-)

How to use it: To bring two or more words together to modify a noun

(Consult dictionary and Editorial Style Guide for rules of hyphenation.)

Example: First-generation college student, mid-20th-century furniture, non-English-speaking family, de-escalate the crisis.

Parentheses ()

How to use it: To add information that is only incidental to the statement

Examples: Participants are required to register (online or in person) to attend the course.

The pathway to college has several options (see Table 2).

Look for more punctuation definitions next month.