

Punctuation Guide

Commas - summary

1. Introductory phrases

Any cohesive device (of any length) that occurs at the start of a sentence should be followed by a comma:

Furthermore, countries such as Japan and Korea have been experiencing economic hardship in recent times.

Other introductory phrases that consist of at least three words should be followed by a comma (In many countries, According to some experts, etc.). The comma after two-word introductory phrases or single words is optional (Nowadays, These days, etc.).

2. Nonessential elements

Nonessential phrases (including cohesive devices) of any length that come in the middle of a sentence should be surrounded by commas:

The view of many people, including the majority of the inhabitants of India, is that vegetarianism is a boon to health.

But if the phrase is essential to the sentence (i.e. removing it would change the meaning of the sentence or produce nonsense), commas should not be used around it:

Countries such as Japan and Korea have been experiencing economic hardship.

If there's any doubt about whether a phrase is essential or nonessential, then either with or without commas is acceptable (see below for examples).

3. Independent clauses

When **and**, **but**, **or**, **nor**, **so**, **yet** come before independent clauses, they should be preceded by a comma (except when the clauses are very short). When they do not precede an independent clause, no comma is used (except in special cases – see below):

Exactly one quarter of the population in England have insurance, and health insurance makes up just under 8% of the total.

4. Subordinate clauses

When a subordinating conjunction (if, while, whereas, although, when, so that, as a result of, because etc.) is used at the start of a sentence, a comma should be used after the first clause:

If newspapers were not allowed to publish stories about politicians' private lives, people would lose interest in politics.

But a comma should not be used before a coordinating conjunction when it comes in the middle of a sentence unless a strong contrast is being shown, i.e. with **while**, **whereas**, **although** etc. (and in some other special circumstances – see below):

People would lose interest in politics if newspapers were not allowed to publish stories about politicians' private lives.

Some believe that all self-employed professionals should pay VAT, while others say that they should only pay social security.

5. Lists of words

Commas are used in lists of modifiers, nouns and longer phrases and clauses, and the use in such lists before **and** is optional:

Music, art and drama are tremendously useful subjects.

OR: *Music, art, and drama are tremendously useful subjects.*

6. Dates

6th July, 2020 is when the wedding will take place.

BUT: *July 2020 is when the wedding will take place.*

7. Places

The number of sports centres in Tokyo, Japan has been going up in recent years.

Commas - in detail: examples and exceptions

1. Introductory phrases

Cohesive devices

There should always be commas after common cohesive devices/discourse markers when they are at the start of a sentence:

In other words,

However,

On the other hand,

Moreover,

In addition,

Therefore,

That is to say,

For example,

In conclusion,

As regards the disadvantages,

Overall,

In general,

etc.

Other introductory phrases

Other introductory phrases (adverbs, adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases etc.) used at the start of a sentence before the main sentence begins that are **at least three words long** should be followed by a comma:

In many countries second-hand clothing is becoming increasingly popular. INCORRECT

In many countries, second-hand clothing is becoming increasingly popular. CORRECT

In my opinion,

According to many experts,

In the majority of cases,

At the start of the period,

- Commas are optional after **two-word introductory phrases** or **single words** (except for cohesive devices of any length, which must always be followed by a comma):

Every year, more and more people are turning to vegetarianism. CORRECT

Every year more and more people are turning to vegetarianism. CORRECT

These days, or These days

Nowadays, or Nowadays

Today, or Today

In India, or In India

etc.

2. Nonessential elements

Nonessential elements (including single words or two-word phrases) that come in the middle of a sentence should be surrounded by commas. A nonessential element is one that could be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence. If the word or phrase is obviously nonessential, or if it is placed so as to jarringly interrupt the normal flow of a sentence, then commas should be placed around it:

The view of many people including the majority of the inhabitants of India is that vegetarianism is a boon to health. INCORRECT

The view of many people, including the majority of the inhabitants of India, is that vegetarianism is a boon to health. CORRECT

It is often claimed that poverty is in most countries decreasing. INCORRECT

It is often claimed that poverty is, in most countries, decreasing. CORRECT

Neil Armstrong the first man on the moon learned to play the oboe in primary school. INCORRECT

Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon, learned to play the oboe in primary school.
CORRECT

At the start of the period, Italy's coal consumption at/with 9% was the highest among the four nations. INCORRECT

At the start of the period, Italy's coal consumption, at/with 9%, was the highest among the four nations. CORRECT

- The commas placed around a nonessential element must be used **both before and after** it. One comma either before or after is not acceptable:

It is often claimed that poverty is in most countries, decreasing. INCORRECT

It is often claimed that poverty is, in most countries, decreasing. CORRECT

People who live in India are nowadays, less religious than in former times. INCORRECT

People who live in India are, nowadays, less religious than in former times. CORRECT

Sanitation has improved in cities, and in many urban areas, crime has gone down.

INCORRECT

Sanitation has improved in cities, and, in many urban areas, crime has gone down.

CORRECT

- If there's any doubt about whether a word or phrase is a nonessential element, or whether the phrase interrupts the normal flow of a sentence, then either with commas or without is acceptable:

It is often claimed that poverty in most countries is decreasing. CORRECT

It is often claimed that poverty, in most countries, is decreasing. CORRECT

People who live in India are, nowadays, less religious than in former times. CORRECT

People who live in India are nowadays less religious than in former times. CORRECT

Sanitation has improved in cities, and, in many urban areas, crime has gone down.

CORRECT

Sanitation has improved in cities, and in many urban areas crime has gone down.

CORRECT

Signing up to the scheme, which before 2010 was impossible, is now easy. CORRECT

Signing up to the scheme, which, before 2010, was impossible, is now easy. CORRECT

Italy's coal consumption started the period as the highest among the four countries at 9%.

CORRECT

Italy's coal consumption started the period as the highest among the four countries, at 9%.

CORRECT

Health insurance comes in second place with only 4% less than auto. CORRECT
Health insurance comes in second place, with only 4% less than auto. CORRECT

Essential elements

If the word or phrase is an **essential element** (that is, removing it would change the meaning of the sentence or make it nonsensical), then commas should not be added before and after it:

People, in many countries, are vegetarians. INCORRECT
People in many countries are vegetarians. CORRECT

Italy's coal consumption started, at 9%, and increased to more than double that the following year. INCORRECT
Italy's coal consumption started at 9% and increased to more than double that the following year. CORRECT

Participial clauses

Clauses beginning with a present participle (-ing) should be preceded by a comma:

This results in increased unemployment among older people leading to increased poverty.
INCORRECT
This results in increased unemployment among older people, leading to increased poverty.
CORRECT

There was an increase in the number of cheap flights available causing people to travel abroad more often. INCORRECT
There was an increase in the number of cheap flights available, causing people to travel abroad more often. CORRECT

Coal consumption increased throughout the rest of the period reaching 7% in 2012.
INCORRECT
Coal consumption increased throughout the rest of the period, reaching 7% in 2012.
CORRECT

- Such clauses should be also followed by a comma if they occur before the end of the sentence:

This results in increased unemployment among older people, leading to increased poverty and that's why I believe it's a serious problem. INCORRECT

This results in increased unemployment among older people, leading to increased poverty, and that's why I believe it's a serious problem. CORRECT

Relative clauses

Non-defining relative clauses should be preceded by a comma:

I believe that the most effective measure would be increasing the number of sports facilities which would lead to greater accessibility. INCORRECT

I believe that the most effective measure would be increasing the number of sports facilities, which would lead to greater accessibility. CORRECT

- If the non-defining clause ends before the end of the sentence, then it should also be followed by a comma:

I believe that increasing the number of sports facilities, which would lead to greater accessibility would be the most effective measure. INCORRECT

I believe that increasing the number of sports facilities, which would lead to greater accessibility, would be the most effective measure. CORRECT

- Defining relative clauses should not be preceded by (or followed by) a comma:

The measure, which would have the biggest impact on public health, is launching a public awareness campaign. INCORRECT

The measure which would have the biggest impact on public health is launching a public awareness campaign. CORRECT

such as and like

A comma should be used before (and after) clauses starting with **such as** and **like** when they are used to give examples:

Income inequality has increased in many European countries, such as the UK and Germany. CORRECT

- If the phrase giving the example ends before the end of the sentence, then it should also be followed by a comma:

Some kinds of used clothes, like sweaters and jeans, are preferred by South Americans over others. CORRECT

- No comma is used before (or after) clauses starting with **such as** and **like** if they are essential elements of the sentence (that is, removing them would change the meaning of the sentence or produce a nonsensical sentence):

Countries, such as Japan and Korea, have been experiencing economic hardship.

INCORRECT

Countries such as Japan and Korea have been experiencing economic hardship. CORRECT

Taking subjects, like art, music and drama, improves students' creativity. INCORRECT

Taking subjects like art, music and drama improves students' creativity. CORRECT

- Sometimes either usage would make sense, so either would be acceptable:

Using sports facilities such as gyms improves people's health. CORRECT

Using sports facilities, such as gyms, improves people's health. CORRECT

respectively

A comma is always needed before *respectively* (and after it if it is in the middle of a sentence) when it is being used as a referencing term, as in the following example:

Coal consumption in 2003 was higher in Italy than in Germany, with 25% and 18%, respectively. CORRECT

Cohesive devices in the middle of a sentence

If cohesive devices are used in the middle of a sentence, commas should always be used around them:

Many people who applied to take part in the new scheme were, however, rejected by the authorities on the grounds of unsuitability. CORRECT

- The commas must come **both before and after** the word or phrase:

Many people who applied to take part in the new scheme were however, rejected by the authorities on the grounds of unsuitability. INCORRECT

Many people who applied to take part in the new scheme were, however, rejected by the authorities on the grounds of unsuitability. CORRECT

It can be seen therefore, that increasing the number of sports facilities would be ineffective. INCORRECT

It can be seen, therefore, that increasing the number of sports facilities would be ineffective. CORRECT

- **Note:** though cohesive devices can be used in the middle of a sentence, they cannot be used to link two independent clauses (or any other sentence parts):

*Very few people actually use sports facilities, **therefore**, increasing the number of them would be ineffective.* INCORRECT

*Many people applied to take part in the new scheme, **however**, most of them were rejected by the authorities on the grounds of unsuitability.* INCORRECT

Independent clauses can only be linked by coordinating conjunctions (**and, but, or, nor, so, yet**):

*Very few people actually use sports facilities, **so** increasing the number of them would be ineffective.* CORRECT

*Many people applied to take part in the new scheme, **but** most of them were rejected by the authorities on the grounds of unsuitability.* CORRECT

3. Independent clauses

Independent clauses (that is, sentence parts that could function as free-standing sentences) are linked by the following conjunctions (called coordinating conjunctions): **and, but, or, nor, so, yet**. The coordinating conjunctions should be preceded by a comma.

Exactly one quarter of the population in England have insurance and health insurance makes up just under 8% of the total. INCORRECT

Exactly one quarter of the population in England have insurance, and health insurance makes up just under 8% of the total. CORRECT

I agree that houses are generally much more spacious and comfortable than apartments but they are also too expensive for the majority of people. INCORRECT

I agree that houses are generally much more spacious and comfortable than apartments, but they are also too expensive for the majority of people. CORRECT

- There shouldn't be a comma before coordinating conjunctions when they are not being used to connect independent clauses (unless the comma is marking off a nonessential element - see above):

The presence of multinationals boosts employment in the host countries, and has a good effect on the economy. INCORRECT

The presence of multinationals boosts employment in the host countries and has a good effect on the economy. CORRECT

Many people go home after work, and sit all evening in front of the TV with a beer.

INCORRECT

Many people go home after work and sit all evening in front of the TV with a beer.

CORRECT

- However, in such cases (when the coordinating conjunction is not being used to link independent clauses), a comma before the conjunction is possible (and, therefore, optional) if there is a marked difference between the second and first items, or when adding a comma improves the clarity of the sentence and prevents confusion:

Educational programs can teach people interesting things about the world, but are mostly very boring. CORRECT

Educational programs can teach people interesting things about the world but are mostly very boring. CORRECT

I'll ask John if he can take over my duties and get in touch with the client, and make a list of other things that need to be done. CORRECT

I'll ask John if he can take over my duties and get in touch with the client and make a list of other things that need to be done. CORRECT

- The comma is also optional before **and** and **or** when they appear in lists of words (see below: Lists of words).

- **Note:** we don't accept sentences starting with the coordinating conjunctions **and**, **but**, **or**, **nor**, but sentences starting with **so** or **yet** are acceptable.

Special cases

When two independent clauses are very short, the comma that would normally precede the conjunction is optional:

It was raining, so we stayed in. CORRECT

It was raining so we stayed in. CORRECT

4. Subordinate clauses

Subordinate clauses are connected with subordinating conjunctions (if, while, whereas, although, when, so that, as a result of, because etc.). When the subordinating conjunction is at the start of the sentence, a comma should be used after the first clause.

If newspapers were not allowed to publish stories about politicians' private lives people would lose interest in politics. INCORRECT

If newspapers were not allowed to publish stories about politicians' private lives, people would lose interest in politics. CORRECT

As a result of the widespread sharing of private data with technology companies the concept of privacy is now meaningless. INCORRECT

As a result of the widespread sharing of private data with technology companies, the concept of privacy is now meaningless. CORRECT

- There should be no comma before the subordinating conjunction when the subordinate clause comes after the main clause:

People would lose interest in politics, if newspapers were not allowed to publish stories about politicians' private lives. INCORRECT

People would lose interest in politics if newspapers were not allowed to publish stories about politicians' private lives. CORRECT

The concept of privacy is now meaningless, as a result of the widespread sharing of private data with technology companies. INCORRECT

The concept of privacy is now meaningless as a result of the widespread sharing of private data with technology companies. CORRECT

They publish such stories, because it's what the public wants. INCORRECT

They publish such stories because it's what the public wants. CORRECT

They should publish such stories, so that people understand who it is that they are voting for. INCORRECT

They should publish such stories so that people understand who it is that they are voting for. CORRECT

Exceptions

A comma should be used before a subordinating conjunction when a strong contrast is being shown (e.g. with **while**, **whereas**, **although** etc.):

Some believe that all self-employed professionals should pay VAT, while others say that they should only pay social security. CORRECT

- A comma is possible (and, therefore, optional) before a subordinating conjunction if it helps avoid confusion or if it is being used as a pause mark to break up a long sentence in a way that doesn't interrupt communication:

I want you to play the oboe at the wedding because my cousin loves fish and so will be attending the Lahore Fish Festival that day and unable to play himself. CORRECT

I want you to play the oboe at the wedding, because my cousin loves fish and so will be attending the Lahore Fish Festival that day and unable to play himself. CORRECT

I think such subjects are just as important as traditional subjects and should be made mandatory at primary schools because they teach children how to be independent thinkers. CORRECT

I think such subjects are just as important as traditional subjects and should be made mandatory at primary schools, because they teach children how to be independent thinkers. CORRECT

- When the subordinate clause and main clause are very short, the comma that would normally precede the main clause is optional:

If she agrees I'll let you know. CORRECT

If she agrees, I'll let you know. CORRECT

Special cases

If a subordinating conjunction comes after a coordinating conjunction (**and, but, or, nor, so, yet**), then no comma is used before the subordinate clause:

They often give food to refugees and, if there is no need to give food, then they at least give shelter. INCORRECT

They often give food to refugees and if there is no need to give food, then they at least give shelter. CORRECT

- Likewise, if a subordinating conjunction comes after **that**, then no comma is used before the subordinate clause:

It was found that, if children take arts subjects from a young age, they get better overall grades than their peers. INCORRECT

It was found that if children take arts subjects from a young age, they get better overall grades than their peers. CORRECT

- However, the comma between a coordinating conjunction or **that** and the subordinating conjunction is optional if a strong contrast is being shown, or if the subordinate clause is a nonessential element:

I believe that, while being able to choose what subjects to study can lead to better results, students should be forced to study only medicine because there is a terrible shortage of doctors. CORRECT

I believe that while being able to choose what subjects to study can lead to better results, students should be forced to study only medicine because there is a terrible shortage of doctors. CORRECT

5. Lists of words

Commas are used in lists to avoid the need to repeat **and** or **or**.

Adjectives

Commas should be placed between listed modifiers:

Thanks for letting us stay at your cosy convenient house. INCORRECT

Thanks for letting us stay at your cosy, convenient house. CORRECT

- However, if **and** or **or** could not be inserted to replace the comma, then no comma should be used:

We really loved the Californian, red wine you plied us with. INCORRECT

We really loved the Californian red wine you plied us with. CORRECT

Nouns

Commas should be placed between the items in a list of three or more nouns, and a comma before the **and** or **or** which comes before the final element of the list is optional:

Music, art and drama are tremendously useful subjects. CORRECT

Music, art, and drama are tremendously useful subjects. CORRECT

Taking music, art or drama at primary school is a waste of time. CORRECT

Taking music, art, or drama at primary school is a waste of time. CORRECT

Other phrases

Likewise, commas should be used between the elements of lists of three or more longer phrases and clauses:

Music improves concentration, art stretches the imagination and drama develops teamwork.
CORRECT

Music improves concentration, art stretches the imagination, and drama develops teamwork.
CORRECT

Coal consumption started at 9%, increased to 11% in 2009 and ended the period at 15%.
CORRECT

Coal consumption started at 9%, increased to 11% in 2009, and ended the period at 15%.
CORRECT

6. Dates

A comma should not be used between a month and a date:

July, 2020 is when the wedding will take place. INCORRECT

July 2020 is when the wedding will take place. CORRECT

➤ A comma should be inserted before the year in full dates:

6th July 2020 is when the wedding will take place. INCORRECT

6th July, 2020 is when the wedding will take place. CORRECT

7. Places

A comma should be inserted between a city or other geographical area and a country or state:

The number of sports centres in Tokyo Japan has been going up in recent years.
INCORRECT

The number of sports centres in Tokyo, Japan has been going up in recent years.
CORRECT

Commas - some common errors

1. Separating a long subject from its verb

There should be no comma between a subject (no matter how long) and its verb:

The increased creativity that comes when someone takes art at primary school and the confidence that is built by taking drama, are significant advantages of such subjects.

INCORRECT

The increased creativity that comes when someone takes art at primary school and the confidence that is built by taking drama are significant advantages of such subjects.

CORRECT

Research carried out by WHO on mortality due to obesity in 2010 in a number of western countries, found that increased consumption of fast food was the biggest factor.

INCORRECT

Research carried out by WHO on mortality due to obesity in 2010 in a number of western countries found that increased consumption of fast food was the biggest factor.

2. Before coordinating conjunctions when they do not precede independent clauses

I had the laptop with me when I went to a cafe, and ordered an omelette.

INCORRECT

I had the laptop with me when I went to a cafe and ordered an omelette.

CORRECT

The increased creativity that is caused by taking art at primary school, and the confidence that is built by taking drama are significant advantages of such subjects.

INCORRECT

The increased creativity that is caused by taking art at primary school and the confidence that is built by taking drama are significant advantages of such subjects.

CORRECT

3. The comma splice: using a comma to connect two independent clauses without a conjunction

Arts subjects involve the analysis of the world in creative ways, as a result, a person arrives at a better understanding of other people.

INCORRECT

Arts subjects involve the analysis of the world in creative ways and, as a result, a person arrives at a better understanding of other people.

CORRECT

4. After 'that'

I believe that, arts subjects involve the analysis of the world in creative ways.

INCORRECT

I believe that arts subjects involve the analysis of the world in creative ways.

CORRECT

That is to say that, a person can arrive at a better understanding of people and problems by means of the arts.

INCORRECT

That is to say that a person can arrive at a better understanding of people and problems by means of the arts.

CORRECT

That is to say, a person can arrive at a better understanding of people and problems by means of the arts.

CORRECT

The only time a comma should be used after **that** is if it precedes a nonessential element (see above).

5. After such as

Arts subjects are mandatory at primary school in some European countries, such as,

Germany and France.

INCORRECT

Arts subjects are mandatory at primary school in some European countries, such as Germany and France. CORRECT

Other punctuation

1. Capital letters

Some common issues

- **Job titles**

Capitalisation of job titles when they are used to refer to a specific person or position is optional:

I was asked by the managing director of our company to handle the negotiation. CORRECT

I was asked by the Managing Director of our company to handle the negotiation. CORRECT

I've applied for the position of project manager at another company. CORRECT

I've applied for the position of Project Manager at another company. CORRECT

The president was overheard ordering a takeaway. CORRECT

The President was overheard ordering a takeaway. CORRECT

I've enjoyed working as a team leader at this company. CORRECT

I've enjoyed working as a Team Leader at this company. CORRECT

India's current finance minister claims that economic development should be the highest priority. CORRECT

India's current Finance Minister claims that economic development should be the highest priority. CORRECT

- The only time a job title must be capitalised is when it precedes a name:
President Obama, Chairman Mao, Queen Elizabeth etc.

- When positions at work are referred to in a more general sense (i.e. words used to describe a role or position in a hierarchy rather than as specific job titles), they should not be capitalised:

A sign of a good Manager is knowing how to delegate. INCORRECT

A sign of a good manager is knowing how to delegate. CORRECT

I believe that more women should be employed as Senior Managers. INCORRECT

I believe that more women should be employed as senior managers. CORRECT

This is because Managers at multinationals are often brought in from abroad. INCORRECT
This is because managers at multinationals are often brought in from abroad. CORRECT

Several Ministers disagree with the policy. INCORRECT
Several ministers disagree with the policy. CORRECT

➤ Jobs should not be capitalised:

I'm now working as a Teacher in a primary school. INCORRECT
I'm now working as a teacher in a primary school. CORRECT

I will start working as a Management Consultant next year. INCORRECT
I will start working as a management consultant next year. CORRECT

For example, a famous Kenyan Doctor once claimed that diet is more important than exercise. INCORRECT
For example, a famous Kenyan doctor once claimed that diet is more important than exercise. CORRECT

- **government, parliament, state**

Either the *government* or *the Government* is acceptable when referring to a specific government:

The government ought to permit more refugees to enter the country. CORRECT
The Government ought to permit more refugees to enter the country. CORRECT

➤ If *government* is not being used to refer to a specific government or is part of a compound noun (e.g. *government spending*), then it should not be capitalised:

The Government of a country can be removed at any time if an election is called and enough people vote for change. INCORRECT
The government of a country can be removed at any time if an election is called and enough people vote for change. CORRECT

It is claimed that Governments should... INCORRECT
It is claimed that governments should... CORRECT

They struggled for many months to form a Government. INCORRECT
They struggled for many months to form a government. CORRECT

➤ The same rules apply to *parliament*:

Yesterday parliament voted against the measure. CORRECT
Yesterday Parliament voted against the measure. CORRECT

England doesn't have its own Parliament. INCORRECT
England doesn't have its own parliament. CORRECT

➤ When *state* is used to mean the governmental body, the same rules apply:

The state appealed against the court's decision. CORRECT
The State appealed against the court's decision. CORRECT

In many countries, such services are provided by the State. INCORRECT
In many countries, such services are provided by the state. CORRECT

➤ **Note:** when *state* is used to mean country (or a state of the United States), it is never capitalised:

There has been mass emigration from the State because of the war. INCORRECT
There has been mass emigration from the state because of the war. CORRECT

- **Institutions and departments**

the University of Oslo
Harvard University

(Note: the WHO or WHO (without *the*) are both acceptable)

But: the department of education or the Department of Education
the supreme court or the Supreme Court

- In the **titles of books and films**, the first words are capitalised and capitalising other important words is optional:

The Silence of the Lambs or The silence of the lambs

- **Newspapers**

Both the Times and The Times are acceptable.

- **Festivals/named events/certain religious words** should be capitalised:

Ramadan, Easter etc.
the Olympic Games
the Bible, the Koran etc.

- **Subjects**

the names of subjects should not be capitalised: chemistry, not Chemistry. But languages are always capitalised: English etc.

- **Qualifications**

a bachelor's (degree) in modern languages (never a Bachelor's (Degree) in Modern Languages)

a master's (degree) in sports science (never a Master's (Degree) in Sports Science)

a doctorate in business administration

BA or B.A.

PhD or Ph.D.

- **Compass points**

When they are part of a proper noun (i.e. the official name of a region or state), then they are always capitalised:

Western Australia

North Carolina

Northern Ireland

- Many such words occur in phrases that, like proper nouns, are used to refer to a specific area (or culture) but are not official names, and in such cases capitalisation is optional:

southeast Asia or Southeast Asia

western Europe or Western Europe

central Europe or Central Europe

the west or the West

the middle east or the Middle East

south India or South India

western leaders or Western leaders

the north or the North (a region of the UK)

- However, when the word is used merely to give a location (and not used by convention like a proper noun), it should not be capitalised:

We travelled around the western part of Australia.

We're heading north in the winter.

Thanks for inviting us to stay with you in the south of France.

If there's any reasonable doubt about what convention applies, then either capitalised or lowercase is acceptable.

- **the earth**

When used with **the**, the earth should not be capitalised.

We know more about the Earth than ever before. INCORRECT

We know more about the earth than ever before. CORRECT

➤ Without **the**, capitalisation is optional:

Many documentaries teach us about life on earth. CORRECT

Many documentaries teach us about life on Earth. CORRECT

- Both **the internet** and **the Internet** are acceptable.

- iPhone, WhatsApp

2. Semicolons

Semicolons are only acceptable when used instead of a full stop to connect two sentences that are closely related.

Some say that only those born with talent can excel; however, others say children can be taught to excel. CORRECT

➤ However, we should never correct from something else to a semicolon, but instead should favour some other punctuation mark, depending on the type of mistake made:

Some say that only those born with talent can excel, however, others say children can be taught to excel. INCORRECT

would be corrected to (e.g.):

Some say that only those born with talent can excel. However, others say children can be taught to excel. CORRECT

OR: *Some say that only those born with talent can excel, while others say children can be taught to excel.* CORRECT

3. Colons

Colons are only acceptable when they precede an explanation of, or elaboration on, what has been said:

There is one major benefit to the presence of multinationals: increased employment.

CORRECT

4. Apostrophes

a week's leave

two weeks' leave or two weeks leave

two weeks' notice or two weeks notice

bosses' bonuses

women's rights

children's books

Chris's phone or Chris' phone

No apostrophe in:

the 1960s

a man in his 30s

But: Iggy Pop formed the Stooges in the '60s.

5. Hyphens and dashes

Compound modifiers should be hyphenated:

a well-known sportsperson

a high-profile investigation

a 45-minute meeting

➤ When the modifier does not precede a noun, then the hyphen is optional:

He is a sportsperson who is very well-known. CORRECT

He is a sportsperson who is very well known. CORRECT

➤ **Dashes** are acceptable around nonessential elements which strongly interrupt the flow of a sentence:

The destruction of the world by climate change – and there is now no doubt that it is manmade – is inevitable.

6. Question marks and exclamation marks

We don't accept rhetorical questions or exclamation marks in Task 2 or Task 1 Academic.

7. Brackets

We don't accept the use of brackets.