

Punctuation

Use marks to end sentences

Purpose

End Punctuation @ Writing Commons

- explains proper usage of periods
- explains proper usage of question marks
- explains proper usage of exclamation points

What is end punctuation?

End punctuation appears at the end of a complete sentence (independent clause) or follows an interjection. The appropriate placement of a period, question mark, or exclamation point separates one statement from another and signals a pause in the word flow. Correct use of end punctuation contributes to the order and readability of the text. The punctuation at the end of a sentence is often determined by the purpose of the sentence.

What is a period?

A period [.] is used at the end of a declarative sentence, that is, a sentence that contains a complete statement.

- The instructor sent an email to her students asking them to participate in a mid-semester survey.
- This email contains instructions on how to proceed.
- Dinner was a delightful affair.

A period may also be used at the end of an imperative sentence, a command telling the reader what to do.

- Go left at the next traffic light.
- Take a break from staring at the computer screen.
- Turn in the paperwork at the front office.

What is a question mark?

A question mark [?] is used at the end of an interrogative sentence—a sentence that asks a question.

- What time does the meeting begin?
- Where should I park the car?
- Where is the nearest recycling bin for paper?

A question mark is not used in a sentence that reports a question.

- He asked if I would like to come to dinner tonight.
- She wondered what the children enjoyed the most during their trip to the museum.
- I don't know what they ate for dinner last night.

What is an exclamation point?

An exclamation point [!] is used in any sentence that conveys strong emotion or excitement.

- I can't wait to go on my vacation!
- I love that movie!
- I just got a raise!

An exclamation point may also be used for an imperative, or command, to show emphasis.

- Watch out for that car!
- Look out for that ice!
- Put that down!

An exclamation point may also be used after an interjection that expresses a strong emotion.

- Oh no! I left my paper on my desk in my dorm room.

- Wow! Did you see that field goal?
- Yikes! Watch out for that spider!