

UTS:

**HELPS**

HIGHER EDUCATION LANGUAGE AND PRESENTATION SUPPORT

# Grammar Review 3: Articles, Punctuation & Prepositions

## Articles

- The articles in the English language are *the* and *a/an*.
- Articles are modifiers that appear before nouns and noun phrases.
- Some nouns and noun phrases do not use articles.

## Rules: a/an, the or Ø

To know when to use or when not to use an article before a noun/noun phrase, some rules are needed. Is the noun/noun phrase:

1. specific or general?
2. singular or plural?
3. countable or uncountable?

	specific	general
countable		
singular	the	a/an
plural	the	Ø
uncountable	the	Ø

## a or an

Using *a* or *an* depends on the sound (not letter) that begins the next word:

- *a* + singular noun beginning with a consonant, consonant sound or pronounced 'h'
  - *a* boy; *a* car; *a* user (the U sounds like Y in you.); *a* university; *a* horse; *a* historical event
- *an* + singular noun beginning with a vowel sound (not letter) or silent 'h'
  - *an* elephant; *an* idiot; *an* hour; *an* honour
- These rules also apply when you use acronyms/initialisations
  - *an* IT student; *a* UTS student

## Punctuation

- Comma
- Semi-colon
- Colon
- Parentheses (Brackets)
- Apostrophe

## Commas: Introductory words/phrases

Introductory words, phrases or subordinate clauses need a comma before the main idea. These are not complete thoughts: they simply introduce the main subject and verb.

Where would you put a comma in each of the following sentences?

- Generally teachers are friendly and helpful.
- **Generally, teachers are friendly and helpful.**
- Throughout his early life Mozart showed signs of genius.
- **Throughout his early life, Mozart showed signs of genius.**
- Dissatisfied with his fame the celebrity went on a reality show.
- **Dissatisfied with his fame, the celebrity went on a reality show.**
- As far as the economy is concerned the mining boom accounts for a large amount of the GDP.
- **As far as the economy is concerned, the mining boom accounts for a large amount of the GDP.**

## Commas: Additional information

When additional information is added to the main idea within a sentence:

- Two commas can be used to separate the additional information from the primary subject and verb of the sentence.
- The words (or the additional information) within the commas are not necessary to understand the rest of the sentence.

Where would you put commas in each of the following sentences?

- The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) with more than 35000 students is Australia's number one under-50 university.
- The University of Technology Sydney (UTS), with more than 35000 students, is Australia's number one under-50 university.
- More and more academics at UTS are using social media more specifically Facebook to encourage their students to interact with one another.
- More and more academics at UTS are using social media, more specifically, Facebook, to encourage their students to interact with one another.

## Commas: Listing things

Where would you put commas in each of the following sentences?

- Critical reflection is a notion that has been associated with a range of outcomes including improved thinking learning and assessment of self and social systems.
- Critical reflection is a notion that has been associated with a range of outcomes, including improved thinking, learning and assessment of self, and social systems.
- Traditional sources were also consulted including *Choice* reviews books on reference services journal and magazine reviews and government websites.
- Traditional sources were also consulted, including *Choice* reviews, books on reference services, journal and magazine reviews, and government websites.



## Commas: Resolving ambiguity

If the information in the sentence can be interpreted in different ways, then use a comma to help separate the information. In other words, create bundles of information by using a comma to separate them. The aim is to make the sentence clear to the reader.

Where would you put a comma in each of the following sentences?

- Let's eat grandpa.
- Let's eat, grandpa.
- Most of the time travellers worry about their luggage.
- Most of the time, travellers worry about their luggage.
- Nigella finds inspiration in cooking her family and her dog.
- Nigella finds inspiration in cooking, her family, and her dog.

## Commas: Run-on sentences

A run-on sentence consists of two or more independent clauses (or complete sentences) which are joined without an appropriate punctuation or conjunction. Commonly, a comma is wrongly used in a run-on sentence.

How would you correct these sentences?

- My lecturer was very mad, I will try harder next time.
- My lecturer was very mad; I will try harder next time.
- My lecturer was very mad. Consequently, I will try harder next time.
- You gave an excellent presentation, it is a pity your exam results were low.
- You gave an excellent presentation; it is a pity your exam results were low.
- You gave an excellent presentation. However, it is a pity your exam results were low.

## Semi-colons: Separating items

Separating items in a list where the items are long or complicated.

How would you correct the sentence?

- You may use the library on condition that your membership is paid quarterly, that you always return books to their rightful place after using them, that you pay any fines for books returned late, and that you are quiet when using the facilities.
- You may use the library on condition that your membership is paid quarterly; that you always return books to their rightful place after using them; that you pay any fines for books returned late; and that you are quiet when using the facilities.

## Semi-colons: Replacing a linking word

Replacing a linking word to suggest a strong relationship between the two independent clauses.

How would you correct the sentence?

- The European Union's history consists of two stages, its original form was known as the European Economic Community (EEC).
- The European Union's history consists of two stages; its original form was known as the European Economic Community (EEC).

## Colons: Introducing material

Introducing material (e.g. quotation, data, diagram, text) that explains, expands, or summarises the comment that precedes it.

Examples:

- Shakespeare's most famous quote says: "To be or not to be."
- The results are as follows:
  - 80% of students passed
  - 20% of students failed
- Life is a puzzle: trying to work it out is half the fun.

## Colons: Introducing a long list

Introducing a list which is long and/or complicated, or to intentionally draw more attention to it. The clause before the colon must be an independent clause.

Examples:

- We covered many aspects in our writing class: grammar, punctuation, and voice.
- My husband gave me the things I needed most: companionship and quiet.

## Colons: Separating subtitles from titles

A colon can be used to separate the subtitle from the title.

Examples:

- Greece: Ancient Times to Modern
- Language: Barriers of European speakers

## Parentheses (Brackets)

- Referencing
  - Smith (2006) argues that A is B.
  - A is B (Smith 2006).
- Indicating information that is extra to the main idea such as giving an example or additional detail, qualifying a point, referring to another part of the text.
  - The survey has shown that most male students prefer exams (see Table 3 for more details).
  - The survey (conducted by the above-mentioned group of students) has shown that...



# Apostrophes

- Contracted forms (but not in academic English)
  - can't (= cannot)
- We use apostrophes before or after the possessive s.
  - The student's answers VS The students' answers
  - The lecturer and student's research VS The lecturer's and student's research
- We do not use apostrophes with possessive determiners and pronouns.
  - The money is ours. (ours = pronoun)
  - The baby had opened its presents. (its = possessive determiner)
- Used for plural references to letters of the alphabet.
  - I got mostly C's and D's in my assignments last year.

## Prepositions at/on/in: Place

- At is used to talk about a position at a point.
  - Turn left at the next intersection.
  - The train terminates at Central Station.
- On is used for position on a surface.
  - It's on the table.
  - It's on Lake Eyre.
- In is used for position inside an area.
  - I work in an office.
  - I live in Sydney.

## Prepositions of Place

General

Specific

**IN****Neighborhoods**

(Chinatown)

**Cities**

(Washington)

**Countries**

(The United States)

**\*Places with a  
Boundary****ON****Streets, Avenues**

(Pennsylvania Ave.)

**Islands**

(Fiji)

**Large vehicles**

(train, bus, ship)

**\*Surfaces****AT****Addresses**

(1600 Pennsylvania Ave.)

**Specific locations**

(home, the corner)

**\*Points**

## Prepositions at/on/in: Time

- At + clock time e.g. at dinner time, at 4pm
- In+ part of day e.g. Let's go in the afternoon
- On+ particular day e.g. I'll email you on Thursday, I'm seeing her on Saturday afternoon.
- At+ weekend, public holiday (the entire holiday) e.g. Come at Christmas on Christmas day.
- In + longer period e.g. It was in the first week of March. It was made in the 18th century. He died in 1930.

N.B. No preposition is used if the day/year has each, every, last, next, this before it. e.g. I go to York every Christmas; I'll see you next Monday afternoon.

## Prepositions of Time

General

Specific

**IN**

Parts of days  
(morning, afternoon)

Months  
(April, May)

Years

Months  
Centuries

**ON**

Holidays with 'day'  
(Labor Day, Christmas Day)

Days of the week  
(Monday)

Days of the month  
(Fourth of July)

Dates  
(April 15, my birthday)

**AT**

Holidays without 'day'  
(Easter, New Year's)

Time  
(noon, midnight, 6:00, 10 am)