

CHAPTER 7

Punctuation and some style points

The aim of punctuation is to make the sense of written words clear. It corresponds to the pauses and emphases in the spoken word. Today the guidelines are common sense and readability, and as a general rule it should be kept to a minimum. Unless asked, editors should not impose their own style on the copy and should use caution in any emendation. The subject is not as daunting as it might appear, and the ‘Punctuation Queen’, Lynne Truss, has got it sorted. There are certain conventions or rules to be followed, and when these are known, your task becomes that much easier.

The subject can be divided into the following sections:

full point; comma; semicolon; paragraphs; quotations; quotation marks; apostrophes; abbreviations and contractions; parentheses and brackets; dashes; hyphens; double punctuation; ellipses; numerals; dates; measurements; question marks and exclamations; capitalisation; time; money; foreign languages.

This book does not provide the most detailed guide possible to punctuation; for this, consult a reference book such as

the *New Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* or Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. It does provide, however, the basic rules that you must know if you are to proofread or copy-edit successfully. Other useful style arbiters include Gower's *Plain Words* and Partridge's *Usage and Abusage*.

It's a wise plan always to be on the lookout for newer, more recent editions of any reference books. The gamble is that you miss out on fantastic bargains in charity shops, like hardly used 900-page dictionaries for £1. The advice is to have the newest edition of just one or two books that count as your main reference books, but back these up with the bargains if you get the chance.

7.1 Full Point

There should be no full point (also known as full stop) at the end of items in a list of figures, plates, tables, etc. There may, however, be a full point at the end of 'displayed material', that is copy indented or otherwise made to stand out, in a list for example, from the main body of the text. A missing full point to be inserted in a manuscript or proof is shown thus: ☉ (See also: double punctuation, parentheses, abbreviations and contractions.)

A full point is not used where a complete sentence is enclosed by parentheses within another sentence.

Ms Anna Politkovskaya, an investigative journalist, was shot dead (it was President Putin's 54th birthday) in a lift outside her flat on Saturday, and protests over her murder quickly spread as far as Helsinki and America.

However, note the full point within parentheses in a complete, separate sentence.