

Question Marks, exclamation marks, colons and semi-colons

A question mark indicates a direct question

The tutor asked, “How many have completed the task?” Don’t use a question mark for an indirect question.

Example:

Incorrect: The tutor asked how many had completed the task?

Correct: The tutor asked how many had completed the task.

Try not to use rhetorical questions. Present your tutor with facts and evidence - not with a series of questions.

Example of rhetorical questions:

- Why do some writers prefer the short story?
- What are the main conventions?
- Why do some readers prefer them?

A declarative sentence, with some evidence, would make this more academic.

Example: Jones (2002) suggests that the short story is popular because...

An exclamation mark indicates very strong feeling

Example:

- Strong feelings (How dare you!)
- Emotions (Arrgghh!)
- Surprise (Oh my goodness!)

Avoid using exclamation marks in academic assignments, unless you are quoting or using direct speech. They can make your writing appear immature and over emotional.

The semi-colon (;)

It is possible to write perfectly well without using semi-colons but they can add variety to your writing.

The semi-colon separates two or more closely related but complete sentences. Think of it as replacing and, or, but, while, when linking close sentences.

Example: It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

Dickens could have written this in other ways:

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.

It was the best of times and it was the worst of times.

The colon (:)

The colon is used to expand on a statement or topic.

Example: I found your office easily: your directions were very clear.

The colon can be used to introduce a list.

Example: Several members of the team assisted with the meeting: John, Peter, David and Keith.