

# 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.