

# PARENTHESES, ELLIPSES, AND BRACKETS

## PARENTHESES

Parentheses are used to enclose loosely related information or figures numbering items in a series.

### 1. To set off incidental information or comment:

Senator Kennedy (Massachusetts) is a chairman of the committee.

The painting (probably the most original in the exhibition) at first received little notice.

The fact that the body cells need more oxygen during and after exercise is reflected by the increased rate of breathing (see chart 2).

### 2. To enclose:

#### a. Letters or figures in enumeration:

She is authorized to (1) sign checks, (2) pay bills, and (3) make purchases.

#### b. References and directions:

The map (see page 70) will help you.

#### c. Question mark to indicate uncertainty:

He was born in 1897(?) in Billings, Montana.

### 3. For accuracy in business letters:

I enclose fifty dollars (\$50).

### 4. In combination with other punctuation marks as follows:

#### a. The comma, semicolon, and period are placed after the second parenthesis when the parentheses set off material in a sentence.

If we go (we are still not sure), you may go, too.

He deceived us (weren't we foolish?); he was very clever.

I believed her (though I can't imagine why).

#### b. The comma, semicolon, colon, and period may precede the first parenthesis in enumerations.

She is authorized to do the following: (1) sign checks with a cosigner; (2) pay bills, if not more than \$50; (3) make purchases.

- The resolution lauded him because
- (1) he was decisive; he did not temporize.
  - (2) he was diligent; he did not merely stimulate industry.
  - (3) he was cooperative; he never stood on the letter of a rule.

c. The question mark and the exclamation point are placed inside the parentheses if the mark belongs to the parenthetical element; otherwise, outside.

Examples:

One of the translators was Aquila (died A.D. 138).  
Have you read the translation of Tyndale (died 1536)?  
He promised to write me from Millwalky (sic).

Do not use parentheses:

1. To indicate deletions. Instead draw a line through the deleted words.
2. To enclose editorial comment. Use brackets for this purpose. Do not overuse parentheses.

## SQUARE BRACKETS

MLA style-

Use square brackets whenever inserting words into an original source to clarify, simplify, or identify. Consider the following guidelines:

1. Place square brackets around ellipsis dots to show omission of words or phrases in a quotation. Put a space before the first bracket and after the last bracket.

**Example:** "In 1981, when President Benjamin Harrison proclaimed the first forest reserves [. . .] his action was called undemocratic and un-American" (Smith 59).

2. Place square brackets when clarifying a pronoun in the quotation because the antecedent is not in the quote that you are using.

**Example:** "At that time he [Lindbergh] had not yet flown the Atlantic."

3. Place square brackets when you need to clarify information in the quote you are using.

**Example:** "The sampling records [from the mountain weather stations] were examined for levels of the same atmospheric gasses."

4. Place square brackets after obvious errors made by the original author and put the Latin word *sic* [meaning thus it is] inside the brackets. In APA style the *sic* is underlined or italicized but in MLA style it is not.

**Example:**

MLA style: "The general's words, however, should be understood in the contrext [sic] of the surrounding battle."

APA style: The general's words, however, should be understood in the context [*sic*] of the surrounding battle."

Other usages of the bracket:

5. Enclose stage directions:

**Example:**

Miranda [sipping her coffee]: Are you glad to see me?  
Ernest [glaring at her]: Of course, not!

6. When enclosing parts within passages already enclosed in parentheses, use square brackets.

**Example:**

Have you read this translation of the Bible (the one by Tyndale [died in 1536])?

## ELLIPSIS

The ellipsis is a mark of punctuation that consists of three spaced periods. It has primarily two usages:

1. **The main usage of ellipsis dots is to indicate an omission within quoted material.** Ellipsis periods are usually not needed at the beginning of quotations because the reader generally is aware that the quotation has come from a larger context. Writers use the ellipsis to eliminate material from the quotation because the information is not needed for the current context; however, care must be taken not to obscure or change the intended meaning of the original author.

### USE OF ELLIPSIS IN MLA-

The Modern Language Association (MLA) style for documenting with ellipsis dots requires that the writer place square brackets around the three periods to show that the ellipsis is the writer's ellipsis and not part of the original material. When the ellipsis is in the middle of the sentence, a space must be placed before the first bracket and after the last bracket. Proper punctuation from the original passage and with the added text is expected. If the ellipsis falls at the end of the sentence, a space comes before the first bracket and a period comes immediately after the last bracket. If the ellipsis is at the end of the quotation, the closing quotation marks come immediately after the last bracket followed usually by the parenthetical citation and then the final period.

Example:

**Original passage**

In the movie *As Good As It Gets*, the character played by Jack Nicholson suffers from obsessive-compulsive behavior as seen in the way he avoids cracks in the pavement and locks and relocks his apartment door five times.

**Ellipsis in the middle of the quote**

Sometimes movies promote stereotypical attitudes about mental disorders such as the obsessive-compulsive behavior in *As Good As It Gets* when "Jack Nicholson [. . .] avoids

cracks in the pavement and locks and relocks his apartment door five times” (Mohr online).

### **Ellipsis at the end of the quote**

Sometimes movies promote stereotypical attitudes about mental disorders by portraying disorders such as obsessive compulsion in outlandish ways like “[i]n the movie *As Good As It Gets* [. . .]” (Mohr online).

#### USE OF ELLIPSIS IN APA-

When writers document using the American Psychology Association (APA) style, they do **not** include brackets. So, if the ellipsis occurs at the end of a sentence, another period is used. An ellipsis should never consist of more than four spaced periods. The APA guideline is the following:

#### **Original Passage from APA Guide:**

Use three spaced ellipsis points (. . .) within a sentence to indicate that you have omitted material from the original source. (see section 3.34, Quotation 1). Use four points to indicate any omission between two sentences. The first point indicates the period at the end of the first sentence quoted, and the three spaced ellipsis points follow. Do not use ellipsis points at the beginning or end of any quotation unless, to prevent misinterpretation, you need to emphasize that the quotation begins or ends in midsentence.

#### **Example of ellipsis between two sentences:**

Use three spaced ellipsis points (. . .) within a sentence to indicate that you have omitted material from the original source. . . . Use four points to indicate any omission between two sentences. The first point indicates the period at the end of the first sentence quoted, and the three spaced ellipsis points follow. Do not use ellipsis points at the beginning or end of any quotation unless, to prevent misinterpretation, you need to emphasize that the quotation begins or ends in midsentence. (p. 119)

#### **Another APA example of ellipsis within a sentence:**

##### **Original passage**

In the movie *As Good As It Gets*, the character played by Jack Nicholson suffers from obsessive-compulsive behavior as seen in the way he avoids cracks in the pavement and locks and relocks his apartment door five times.

##### **Ellipsis in the middle of the quote**

Sometimes movies promote stereotypical attitudes about mental disorders such as the obsessive-compulsive behavior in *As Good As It Gets* when “ Jack Nicholson . . . avoids cracks in the pavement and locks and relocks his apartment door five times” (Mohr, 2001).

## **2. The one other usage for an ellipsis mark is to show a break or hesitation in dialog.**

“She just doesn’t care . . . She just doesn’t care.”

“Watch out, Bill! If you do that we’ll. . . .”

## PRACTICE

In the following sentences, provide the correct marks of punctuation--parentheses, brackets, ellipses. Replace underlined words with ellipses.

1. But the monkey, as I have told you, is a nuisance.
2. The end marks of punctuation are 1 period, 2 exclamation point, and 3 question mark.
3. The child wrote:

Dear Ma

I am tird.

Please corn git me.

John

4. The statement read: "Enclosed you will find fifty dollars \$50 to cover expenses."
5. I saw *The Taming of the Shrew* William Shakespeare, and then the musical adaptation *Kiss Me, Kate*.
6. Two of my friends one has very serious emotional problems need psychiatric help.
7. Simon was born in 1804 ? and traveled extensively as a young boy.
8. We watched the zoo attendant feed the animals from a safe distance to be sure.
9. She received a check can you believe it for \$10,000 from the contest she entered.
10. The author wrote in the heading: "Boston, Massichusitts, sic June 10, 1945."