

RULES FOR PARENTHESES, BRACKETS, AND ELLIPSES

Parentheses (), brackets [], and ellipses ... are forms of punctuation that are used in specific situations to communicate certain ideas.

Parentheses

Parentheses are used to hold extra information or side comments. They can help clarify, explain, or give an example; sometimes they're just random thoughts. You'll also see them used for numbers or letters in an outline or list.

Use parentheses () ...

- A) to add extra info that helps explain something or gives a clearer picture:
 - Temperatures were above average last summer (see Figure 2).
 - Gather your ingredients: flour (2 cups), sugar (1 cup), butter (½ cup, melted), and eggs (2 large).
- B) for side comments or afterthoughts:
 - Remember to preheat the oven (a step many people forget).
 - When baking cookies, leave some space between them on the tray. (They spread out as they bake.)
 - After mixing, let the dough rest for 30 minutes. (You can use this time to clean up a bit.)
- C) to put numbers or letters in a list or outline:
 - Answers on a multiple choice test are often expressed A) True, B) False, and C) No Information, or (A), (B)...
- D) to introduce new information, such as an abbreviation, or to note a citation:
 - For this recipe, you'll need two tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil (EVOO).
 - In their paper, Watson and Crick (1953) proposed a novel structure for deoxyribonucleic acid or DNA.
- E) to group numbers or variables in mathematics and science that need to be calculated first ("Order of Operations"), in function notation, and when talking about coordinate pairs:
 - $3 \times (4 + 2) = 18$
 - $f(x) = 2x + 3$
 - (4, -2)

Important to remember:

(If a full sentence is inside parentheses, put the period or other punctuation inside the parentheses, like this.) If just a part of a sentence is in parentheses, (put the punctuation outside), like this.

Avoid placing text inside parentheses that are already inside another set of parentheses. Instead, use brackets to make your writing clearer and less confusing.

Brackets

Brackets [] are used to add comments or information into quotes, point out mistakes in text, and put extra information within a side note. (There is more than one kind of bracket [angle brackets < >, brace or “curly brackets” { }, and square []], but we’ll focus only on the most-used kind, Square Brackets [], or simply Brackets.) Even though they look similar, brackets and parentheses have different jobs.

Use brackets [] ...

- A) to add comments or explanations **inside a direct quote**. The brackets show that this extra information wasn’t part of the original quote:
 - Ina stated, “Mario [the sous chef] had already finished planning the menu.”
 - “I always add a bit of sugar to my tomato sauce [to balance the acidity of the tomatoes].”
- B) to add extra information that’s already inside parentheses:
 - Julia Child's recipe (which she developed during her time in Provence [specifically, in the summer of 1952]) revolutionized American home cooking.
 - The precise temperature for caramelization (scientifically measured at 338°F [or 170°C, where sugar molecules begin to break down]) transforms sugar into a rich, golden syrup.
 - Microbial growth in sourdough starter (modeled by exponential equation $[N(t) = N_0 \cdot e^{(rt)}]$) predicts fermentation dynamics.
 - The protein denaturation rate (observed in egg whites $[T = 63^\circ\text{C}]$) changes the molecular structure during cooking.
- C) to show any changes to a quote by someone who isn’t the original author (which is often done to make the quote grammatically correct) or to point out mistakes in quoted text by putting the word "sic" in brackets right after the error. Using “sic” (from Latin, “thus”) shows that the mistake is from the original text and that it is being left as it is:
 - “The recipe says to add too [sic] teaspoons of salt.”
 - Original quote: “Cook until it’s tender.”
 - Modified: “Cook until [the meat] is tender.”
- D) to indicate emotion, sound effects, musical and visual cues, in scripts and audio dramas:
 - —This dish is supposed to be spicy! [exasperated] Not a bland bowl of sadness!
 - Emeril: “Did you hear that?” [footsteps approaching]
Rachel: “Just keep moving!” [sirens wailing in distance as eerie violin music builds]

- E) In musical notation, brackets can separate sections in a large score, group staves (plural of staff) together, indicate optional notes, or create a triplet. You will often see curved ends in music.
- F) In mathematical and scientific notation, the placement of brackets and parentheses is reversed, so you would place parentheses within brackets. When solving an equation, start with what's inside the parentheses first (called the "order of operations").
- Imagine you're calculating the total cost of ingredients for a recipe, and you have a discount applied to some of the items: Total Cost = $2 \times [(3+4) \times 5 + (6-2) \times 3]$ →
 $3 + 4 = 7$; $6 - 2 = 4$; $7 \times 5 = 35$ and $4 \times 3 = 12$; $35 + 12 = 47$; multiplied by 2 = 94.

Important to remember:

In sports, a *tournament bracket* is a visual representation of a *tree structure*. They are called "brackets" because the structure looks like square brackets.

Ellipses

Ellipses are made up of three periods together and indicate that material is missing in a sentence or passage.

Ellipses (...) are used:

- A) when you leave out part of a direct quote, whether it's a single word, a phrase, or several sentences:
- "This cake is ~~beautiful, absolutely delicious, and~~ perfectly baked!" →
 "This cake is...perfectly baked!"
 - "We hold these truths...that all men are created equal."
- B) when someone is pausing, hesitating, not finishing their thought, or trailing off into silence:
- The pastry chef remarked, "Folding in the meringue requires a delicate touch... too much pressure ruins the entire texture."
 - To be continued...
- C) when there is a pause for dramatic effect or suspense:
- Gordon Ramsay famously critiqued a contestant's dish: "This is so undercooked... it's practically still walking!"
- D) to suggest that there's more, or to suggest additional unspoken commentary:
- The judge noted, "Your technique shows promise, but this cake... well, let's just say it needs work."

Important to remember:

If you're cutting out part of a single sentence, use a regular, three-dot ellipsis. However, when you're cutting out more than one sentence in a quote, use a closed, or four-period, ellipsis:

- "He was tired after the long day.... He still decided to go for a run.

Resources:

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association: The Official Guide to APA style* (7th ed.).

Center for Academic Success. (2019, December 19). *Parentheses*. Butte College.

<https://www.butte.edu/departments/cas/tipsheets/punctuation/parentheses.html>

Center for Academic Success. (2019, December 19). *The Dash, Slash, Ellipses, and Brackets*. Butte College.

https://www.butte.edu/departments/cas/tipsheets/punctuation/dash_slash_ellipses_brackets.html

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University of Chicago Council of Science Editors. (2007). *Scientific style and format: The CSE manual for authors, editors, and publishers* (7th ed.).