99 Punctuation

1 Punctuation symbols

We use punctuation to divide written language into units (e.g. clauses and sentences):

SYMBOL	NAME	USE
A, B, etc.	capital letter	shows the start of a sentence
.	full stop or period (Am E)	shows the end of a sentence
,	comma	separates parts of the same sentence
?	question mark	used after a direct question (➤ Unit 61)
!	exclamation mark	usually informal, used after an order, an exclamation or something surprising (➤ Unit 108)
:	colon	introduces a list or further information
;	semi-colon	divides two main clauses
–	dash	usually informal, can be used in the same way as colons, semi-colons and brackets
-	hyphen	joins the parts of compound words, can be used between dates, etc.
'	apostrophe	used in short forms and possessive forms (➤ Unit 6)
" "	quotation marks	enclose words of direct speech (➤ Unit 68.1)
' '	inverted commas	enclose speech, names such as book titles, or something we want to point out
( )	brackets or parentheses	enclose additional information, references or dates

- In website and email addresses we pronounce . as 'dot' and @ as 'at',
  e.g. chairman@pearson.com is said as 'chairman at pearson dot com'
- In numbers (but not prices) we read . as 'point':
  16.15 = 'sixteen point one five' $16.15 = 'sixteen dollars (and) fifteen cents'

2 Dividing a sentence

Commas separate items in a list. We don't usually put commas in front of *and* and *or* at the end of a list:
*David Bowie is **a singer, a songwriter, an actor and** an Internet entrepreneur.*

We use a comma if we put a subordinate clause before a main clause:
***Although he was German,** Handel spent most of his life in England.*

We also use a comma to divide non-defining relative clauses (➤ Unit 73.2) and some linking words and phrases (➤ Unit 101) from the rest of the sentence:
*Mozart**, who was born in Salzburg,** spoke German. **However,** most of his operas are in Italian.*

If a sentence has two main clauses, we can separate them with a semi-colon:
*We didn't spend much money. I bought an opera CD**; my brother** bought some folk music.*

🔊 **Pronunciation ➤ 1.34**

3 Introducing information

We use a colon to introduce a list:
There are four musicians in the group: a guitarist, a violinist, a pianist and a drummer.

We use brackets to enclose short pieces of extra information such as dates and explanations:
*W. A. Mozart **(1756–1791)** was the greatest composer of the classical period.*
*The BBC **(British Broadcasting Corporation)** has just launched a new digital channel.*

We use quotation marks or inverted commas to enclose direct speech. We separate the reporting verb from the direct speech with a comma. Note the position of the punctuation:
He said, "That musical was fantastic." "Really? I didn't like it very much," she replied.