

Where does the comma ~~x~~ go?

**A BRIEF AUSTRALIAN GUIDE
TO PUNCTUATION, NUMBERS
AND OTHER COMMON
WRITING ISSUES**



Commas

 **Incorrect**

Authors who are writing their first book, often put commas in the wrong places.
Authors, who are writing their first book, often put commas in the wrong places.

 **Correct**

Authors who are writing their first book often put commas in the wrong places.

 **Incorrect**

My next-door neighbour told me where to put the commas, and because she reads a lot, I did what she told me.

 **Correct**

My editor told me where to put the commas and, because she's an editor, I did what she told me.

Numbers

 **Avoiding ambiguity**

There was a team with **eight people**.

There were **four teams** with **8 people**, **fifteen teams** with **9 people** and **one team** with **10 people**.

 **Avoiding ambiguity**

I went away for **10 days**.
I took a **10-day** holiday.

That lead singer is only **19 years old**.
She is a **19-year-old** lead singer.

Brackets

 **Incorrect**

Sometimes I put the brackets in the wrong place (though not always.)

 **Correct**

Sometimes I put the brackets in the wrong place (though not always).

 **Incorrect**

Sometimes I put the brackets in the wrong place. (I'm not very good at punctuation).

 **Correct**

Sometimes I put the brackets in the wrong place. (I'm not very good at punctuation.)

Lists

Incorrect

I always have problems with lists because -

- I don't know where the punctuation goes;
- I don't know how to capitalise them;
- Grammar;
- I don't know which style to use.

Correct

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Full sentences have a full stop at the end of each point.
- Full sentences don't have a semicolon at the end.
- Sentence fragments do not have a capital letter at the start of each point, and only have a full stop at the end of the last point, as demonstrated in the bullet list below.

Here is some punctuation you can use in your book:

- full stops
- commas
- quote marks.

Hyphenation

Avoiding ambiguity

I signed a contract for the **long term**.

I signed a **long-term** contract.

The candidate is going to lose the election **big time**.

The candidate is heading for a **big-time** election loss.

Apostrophes

The *only* time **it's** has an apostrophe is for **it is**.

An **apostrophe is not needed** for terms such as MPs or CEOs.

Copyright

How much can I reproduce of somebody else's work before I need permission?

Not even a copyright lawyer can definitively answer this question for you. You've probably heard figures such as it's okay to reproduce 200 words without permission, or 150 words, but this is not technically correct. No word limits are included in copyright law. What is central to whether copyright has been infringed is whether a 'substantial part' of a work has been used, but there is no definition of a 'substantial part' in copyright law.

If you reproduce 200 words of a 300-word poem in your book without permission, that would be considered a 'substantial part' and you will have infringed the poet's copyright. If you reproduce 200 or 250 words of a 120,000-word book, you're probably fine, as long as the source is appropriately acknowledged.

What if I change a few words?

Changing a few words here and there in material you wish to use isn't enough to avoid potential copyright issues.

How do I 'register' my book for copyright?

Authors are often under the misapprehension that they somehow need to 'register' their book before it is protected by copyright. In many countries – such as the US and the UK – this is true, but not in Australia. It's automatically protected as soon as you write it.

What is 'public domain'?

'Public domain' is a term that's often misunderstood. People often take this term to mean anything that's available to the public, but this isn't the case. Work is only in the public domain when copyright has expired. The laws have changed over the years so you have to be careful, but in Australia copyright generally expires 70 years after a work is published or the death of the author, whichever is later.

Referencing material you have used

Books:

Hanrahan, M 2015, *Stand Out: 7 steps to self-publishing a book that will build your profile, promote your business and make you stand out from the crowd*, Michael Hanrahan Publishing, Melbourne

Articles:

Fleishman, G 2016, 'How to use one Mac in multiple rooms', *Macworld*, vol. 219, pp 37–38

Other random stuff

I love to **practise** my basketball. Then I can play well when I go to **practice**.

And, despite what your teachers taught you, there is nothing wrong with **starting a sentence with 'and'**.

To make the play-offs, teams have to win between 45 **and** 50 games. Most teams have 7 **to** 10 games remaining.

Never use **such as** or **for example** *and etc.* in a single list. **Such as** and **for example** already indicate that the list is incomplete.

Use italics for **magazine titles, newspaper titles, book titles, movie titles** and **musical compositions**. Use quote marks for **song titles, report titles** and **article titles**.

When referring to **Prime Minister** Turnbull, use capitals. When writing that Tony Abbott wishes he was still **prime minister**, do not use capitals.

Phrases such as search engine optimisation and mission statement **do not require capitalisation**.

Don't use **like** when you really mean **such as**. For example, 'I love watching Tom Cruise movies **like** *Mission: Impossible* and *Jack Reacher*' should be 'I love watching Tom Cruise movies **such as** *Mission: Impossible* and *Jack Reacher*'.

Full stops are required for abbreviations such as cont., Vic. and etc.

Full stops are not required for contractions such as Mr, Qld and Dr.

Full stops are not required for initialisms such as USA and AFL.

Whilst and **amongst** are very formal and are usually best avoided. Use **while** and **among**.

When using a term such as search engine optimisation (SEO), **spell it out in full** at the first instance with the intialism in brackets afterwards (as shown in this sentence), and then **use only the intialism**. If a term is only used occasionally throughout your book, spell it out at the first instance in chapter in which it is used and then continue to use the intialism for the remainder of the chapter, so that your readers don't forget what the intialism stands for.

Avoid redundancies, such as **work colleague, past history** and **collaborate together**.

Use a space before **km, kg** and the like; for example, **25 km, 47 kg** and **9 am**.

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