

# Graphological Elegance of English Punctuation Notations

E. Chukwu

## ***Abstract***

*The media of writing and spoken language generally have the grammatical units-morpheme, word, phrase, clause, sentence - as the element for encoding ideas. Semantically, these units have ideas about the real world embodied in them, and structurally, they adhere to the rules of the syntax of English. However, this graphological signifier and signified linearly arranged to communicate thought remain meaningless without a careful embellishment of writing and speech with punctuation notation. This paper subsumes, via documentary examination, the elegance of the accurate use of punctuation notations, the implications of correct application to writing and speech, and the necessity of being mindful of these fundamental language tools enriching writing and speech with elegance, coherence, and endearment. Added to the purpose of this paper is a tip on proper capitalization the careful use of which marks one out as being intimate with the mechanics of the language.*

## **Introduction**

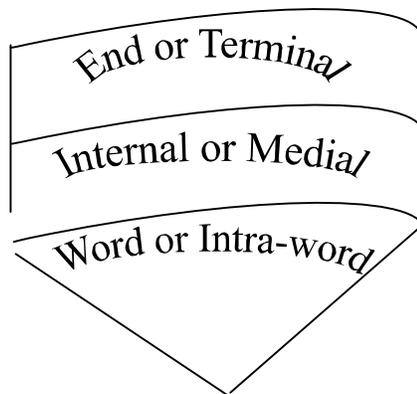
The general principles governing the use of punctuation are (1) that if it does not clarify the text it should be omitted and (2) that in the choice and placing of punctuation marks the sole aim should be to bring out more clearly the author's thought. This means that punctuation must be bound to communication, not to rules. If violating any rule enhances the sense or even the grace of a sentence, one ought to violate the rule; otherwise he violates both the sentence and the reason for the rules (Waldhorn and Zeiger 1980)

That punctuation is important, all agree; but few comprehend the extent of its importance. The writer, who neglects punctuation or mispunctuates, is liable to be misunderstood; this, according to popular idea, is the sum of the evils arising from heedlessness or carelessness. It does not seem to be known that even where the sense is perfectly clear, a sentence may be deprived of half of its force, its spirit, its point, by improper punctuation (Edgar Allan Poe in Ezugu 2001)

These incontrovertible assessments emphasize the indispensability of punctuation as a graphological feature used unconformably or conventionally in writing. The term graphology refers “to the writing system of a language” (Crystal 2003:211).

### **What is Punctuation?**

Punctuation marks are visual notations carefully deployed at acceptable places in linear sequences of written expressions. These marks obey conventions by restricting themselves to the fixed rules of their uses and functions, but by serving the purpose a writer deploys them to put across his thought, they obey individual’s idiosyncratic style. Which ever options taken, punctuation is variously used and appeared in various positions in writing: end or terminal punctuation, internal or medial punctuation, and word or intra-word punctuation.



### **End or Terminal Punctuation**

1. The Full stop or period (.)
2. The Question mark (?)

3. The Exclamatory mark (!)

### **The Internal or Medial Punctuation**

1. The comma (,)
2. The colon (:)
3. The semi-colon (;)
4. The parenthesis (Bracket) ( )
5. The dash (—)
6. The Ellipsis (...)
7. The caret (^)

### **The word or intra-word punctuation**

1. The Apostrophe or Genitive (')
2. The Hyphen (-)
3. The Italics
4. The Quotation marks (“ ”)

The end marks signify sentence types according to function. Sentences that end with a full stop, a question mark, or an exclamatory mark are declarative, interrogative and exclamatory sentences. These symbols appear at the end of these grammatical expressions to differentiate one from the other. The omission of these marks distorts intended ideas and presents a writer as not fully in control of his writing. In other words these marks indicate these sentence–types and point out that such sentences have come to an end.

### **Comprehending the Uses of Punctuation Notations**

#### **Full Stops**

After abbreviations or shortened words.

- i. After abbreviations  
B.C.            e.g.  
A.D.            et al  
P.D.P.          etc.  
A.N.P.P.      P.T.O.
- ii. Shortened word

Prof., Rev., Min., Corp.

However, the full stop is discarded when an abbreviation contains the initial and the last letters of a word and when the abbreviation is fully known.

### 1. Initial and last letter

a. Mr., b. Dr., c. St.

### 2. Known abbreviation

i. BBC

ii. UNESCO

iii. OED

iv. UN

v. USA

English Language, Course No. 447b of Rapid Results College (P.79) explains that “abbreviations can be useful if the full phrase is long and cumbersome, and if the abbreviation is well known”. However, it advises one “not to fall into the trap of speaking or writing entirely in abbreviations, as this is a modern form of slang, and subject to the same disadvantage also”.

### 3. Marking abbreviation

- a. w.w. - wrong word
- b. w.s. - wrong spelling
- c.w.s. - wrong syllabification
- d. w.w.s. - wrong word separation  
e.gs.: Int-erp-ret-ers  
Int-ern-at-io-nal
- e. b.h. - bad handwriting
- f. i.h. - Illegible handwriting
- g. b.c. - Bad cancellation
- h. u.w. - Untidy work

### **The Question Mark (?)**

Two types of questions exist: the wh- question and the yes – no or polar question. The former is stated with the relative pronouns – why, where, what, who, whose, whom, how, when. The latter is initiated by the auxiliary

verbs. Nevertheless, the common mark for both is the presence of the interrogative marker at the end.

### **Other Uses**

#### i. Emphasis

A Statement can be turned into a question for emphasis or to get clarification, e.g.

i. He died yesterday. – Statement

j. He died yesterday? – Question

#### ii. Exceptions

The question mark is not used for indirect questions:

(a) Do you need a ride? - Direct question

(b) He asked me if I needed a ride. – Indirect question

### **The Exclamation Mark (!)**

This is used to indicate strong feeling or emotion. Many people habitually exclaim about any trivial happening. A person in extreme danger, a cry of helplessness, etc are conditions for making use of exclamation or applying the symbols; otherwise, it will be trivialized. Waldhorn and Zeiger (1980) warn: “The exclamation mark ought to be used purposefully, not loosely. Overuse of the exclamation mark characterizes ‘the schoolgirl style’. When hesitating between the exclamation mark and another mark, generally prefer the other mark’.

Examples of usage

1. They have tied me to a stake,

I cannot fly

But bear – like I must fight the cause!

(Extreme danger and helplessness)

ii. Hence home you idle creatures!

Get you home, is this a holiday!

(Passion of anger)

## **The Internal or Medial**

These punctuation marks are used to indicate the interruption of the flow of thought in the linear sequences of sentences. The reading speed is slowed to enable the reader to grasp what is added or subtracted or to make him understand the course the writing is taking.

### **The Comma (,)**

It indicates a minor pause in a sentence and also separates sentence elements. The comma can be used in various ways as enunciated in *Dictionary of Correct English*:

- a. It is used to separate words or phrases in a list:
  - i. He was tall, dark and handsome.
  - ii. She set the fork and spoon, and the cup and saucer, on the table.
  - iii. Slowly, cautiously, and trembling, I opened the door.
  
- b. It is used to separate clauses in a sentence (only if the adverbial clause (come before) the main clause):
  - i. When you are ready, let me know.
  - ii. While he was dazed, hoodlums carted away his good.
  
- c. It is used to separate a co-ordinate clause from the main clause if there is a change of topic:
  - i. She locked the door, and went to bed (- change of topic)
  - ii. She locked the door and refused to open it ( - No change of topic)
  
- d. It is used to enclose non-defining adjectival clauses (or non-restrictive phrases or clauses) which would otherwise become defining – with the whole sentences taking on a new meaning:

- i. My brother, who is studying in England, is home for the holidays. (- non defining)
- ii. My brother who is studying in England is home for the holidays. (-defining)

Non-defining, otherwise called non-restrictive or non-limiting, clauses or phrases give incidental details about the nouns they modify. On the contrary, defining, otherwise called restrictive or limiting clauses or phrases, restrict or limit the nouns they modify, i.e. the essential information about the nouns they modify.

e. it is used to mark off direct speech. Direct speech is the exact word spoken by a speaker:

- i. “Please ask her”, he said, “if she has seen my dog?”
- ii. He asked me, “Do you live here?”

f. It is used to mark off words used in addressing people. These words are called vocatives. A vocative is an optional element (name, pronoun, title, etc) added to a sentence. This indicates the person(s) to whom the sentence is directed. The vocative has two functions:

- i. To mark or single out the addressee and get his attention.
- ii. To express the attitude of the speaker towards the person addressed (whether the attitude be respectful, friendly, sarcastic, etc). The vocative therefore indicates the relationship between speaker and addressee.

The vocative can occur at the beginning, the middle or the end of sentences:

- i. You, **my dear sir**, are now under arrest.
- ii. Be quite there, **you two in the corner!**
- iii. You have a visitor, **Mrs. Smith.**
- iv. Your father left this for you, **Jim**
- v. **Ladies and gentlemen**, it’s my pleasure to introduce...
- vi. Help me, **somebody!**
- vii. Here, **son**, take this

- viii. **Waiter**, two coffees, please
- ix. I'm sorry, **Jane**, that I forgot your birthday

g. It is used to enclose or mark off words and phrases in apposition. A noun is in apposition with another noun, when it identifies the same person or object under another name or when it refers to the same thing as the previous noun or noun equivalent. The two nouns or noun equivalents are in the same case, equal in function and bear a similar relation to the rest of the sentence.

E.gs.

- i. Tom Smith, our new neighbor, is a member of the town council.
- ii. Paris, the capital of France, is an international fashion center.
- iii. Mrs White, our headmaster, will be retiring next month.
- iv. Singapore, an island nation, is an energetic country.

### **Exception**

Noun clauses in apposition are not enclosed by commas

- i. The excuse that you didn't see the notice is not good enough.
- ii. The fact that he had done it on purpose made her action even more unpardonable.
- iii. The news that he had left came as a surprise to all.

Some other uses of the comma as set down by Waldhorn and Zeiger include:

h. It is used to prevent misreading – even temporary misreading:

- i. When I want to dance, well women grow sick.
- ii. In brief, dresses will be shorter.
- iii. Should you wish to swim, the ocean lies at your doorstep.
- iv. Although there were jobs for a hundred, thousands applied.
- v. The soldier dropped a bullet in his leg.

i. It is used to separate the year from the month or important festivals:

- i. May 27, 2006
- ii. Esther, 2006

j. It is used to separate parts of geographical names, addresses and the like.

### **1. Geographical Names**

- a. Zuma rock, Abuja
- b. Awka, Anambra

- c. River Niger, Onitsha
- d. Victoria Island, Lagos

**2. Addresses:**

- a. 20 Awgu Street, Enugu, Nigeria
- b. Government Technical College, Awgu
- c. P.M.B.88, Awka North L. G.A, Awka
- d. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

k. It is used after the salutation and complimentary close of a letter:

**a. Salutation**

Dear Sir,

Dear madam,

Dear Dr. Ezeaku

**b. Complimentary Close**

Yours sincerely,

Yours faithfully,

Yours obedient servant,

c. It is used to set off two or more contrasting statements or words:

a. 'Millions for defense, not a damned penny for tribute.'

b. I want a pen, not a pencil

Asterisk preceding the sentences below is used to indicate ill-formed or ungrammatical or deviant or erroneous construction.

**Exception:**

1. Do not use the comma to separate the subject from its verb:

\* The young man standing on the knoll by the stream, is the heir apparent of the chiefdom.

2. Do not use the comma to separate verb from its object:

\* The fearless hunter famously known for hunting down wild animals has once again killed, a fierce leopard terrorizing the community.

3. Do not use the comma to separate the complement from

its linking verb:

- \* General Rommel reputed for his wiles during the Second World War became, the Desert Fox of the battle field.

4. Do not use the comma to precede the first or to follow the last item of a series:

- \* Who believes that, beans, butter, bread, build biceps?

### **The Colon (:)**

This, according to Walhorn and Zeiger, signals that a statement or an explanation or an enumeration follows: it is a mark of anticipation primarily. Ezugu (2001) and Chukwuma and Otagburuagu (2002) call it the mark that introduces the reader to or alerts him about something to follow.

Tracy (1980) supplies the uses of the colon in writing:

1. It is used to separate the two statements when the second explains or elaborates on the first. The two statements separated are clauses, but the second clause will explain or amplify or contrast with the first. The colon, by so doing this, means that is to say'; therefore':

- i. She possesses all the qualities he wishes for in a wife: she is pretty, patient, healthy and good.
- ii. When angry, count four: when very angry, swear? (Mark Twain)

2. It is used to separate two statements when the second gives the reason for the first. Here, the colon replaces the word 'because':

- i. Nobody turned up for the gathering yesterday: it was raining heavily.
- ii. He died in his sleep: he was throttled by a demon.

3. It is used to introduce a number of items in a list; the colon means namely; 'Viz.', as follows':

i. These items were found in the desk: a book, a pen, two pencils, an eraser and a ruler.

4. It is used to introduce a long or formal quotation:

i. Thoreau wrote: The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation’

ii. Mark Anthony addressed the mob: ‘Friends, Romans, country men, lend me your ears,…….’

### **The Semicolon (;)**

This is the punctuation mark used in writing and printing, between a comma and full stop in value (OED). It inserts pause into statements, but this pause is longer than that of a comma and shorter than that of a full stop.

The uses:

1. It is used to separate clauses where a conjunction is not used:

Examples:

a. He was working in the field; his sisters went to fetch firewood.

b. He did not tell her; he did not trust her to keep it a secret.

2. It used to separate clauses or phrases already containing commas:

Examples:

a. As Caesar loved me, I wept for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoiced at it; but as he was ambitious, I slew him?  
(Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar)

3. It is used before conjunctive adverbs such as also, yet, otherwise, therefore, thus, rather, hence, nevertheless, however, moreover, consequently, besides, furthermore, accordingly, etc when they are used to join clauses.

Example:

a. All power corrupts; moreover absolute power corrupts absolutely.

b. She did not show much interest in her studies; otherwise, she wouldn’t have failed.

c. He championed the cause for democracy; hence, he was elected the president.

- d. He treated her badly; yet, she still loved him
- 4. It is used to separate items when it is not necessary to use ‘and’ to link the last item in a series to the rest.

Example:

Explain. “ambiguity; sensitivity; ‘clauses’, ‘induction’; ‘vanity’.

### **The Parenthesis or Bracket ( ) ( )**

This is a sentence or clause or phrase or word within another sentence marked off by commas, dashes or brackets. A parenthesis explains or gives more information about the main idea of the sentence. The group enclosed in brackets can be removed without altering the meaning of the sentence structure.

- 1. Parentheses marked off by commas
  - a. The principal of the school, who is the Nut Chairman, is now appointed the commissioner of education.
  - b. Anyone who is caught, she warned, will be severely punished.
- 2. Parentheses marked off by dashes
  - a. The birds –wren, weaver – bird, hornbill, etc – were invited to a feast.
  - b. The whole family – with the possible exception of Jim- were full of enthusiasm.
- 3. Parentheses set off by brackets, according to Tracy (1980), are used to enclose words which do not form part of the normal construction of the sentence but which constitute a parenthesis or a break-off in order to explain the meaning or make the meaning clearer.

Sentence examples supplied:

- a. My grandmother (my maternal grandmother) is staying with us.
- b. The newspaper (the Daily Independent) is published in Lagos.

- c. We arrived at the campus (Nnamdi Azikiwe Campus) when the guest speaker (the Dean of the Social Sciences) was about to commence her inaugural lecture.

### **The Dash (-)**

This is a horizontal stroke of the penora mark used in typing and printing to separate or set off added information to the meaning and structure of the sentence.

### **Uses**

1. It is used to show that a writer has changed his thought about what he is stating. This sudden turn in thought affects both the meaning and the structure of the sentence.

### **Examples:**

- a. The necessity of studying is – however, I should talk about it later.
  - b. I shall remain forever guiltless — anyway, God will vindicate the just.
2. It is used mark off or separate parenthesis in writing.

### **Examples:**

- a. The heir-apparent-as the community knows-is concerned about his people's welfare.
  - b. The whizkid - widely accepted as a genius – is mesmerizing his colleagues.
3. It is used to indicate appositive expressions.

### **Examples:**

- a. Prof. Okaikoi – the provost - took the audience down to memory lane.
  - b. Nnamdi Azikiwe University - an enviable citadel of learning - is known for its ICT learning encouragement.
4. It is used to mark off the summary given to items in a list. This summary makes the items have a common origin, significance, result, sign, etc.

- a. Bread, butter, milk, sugar, biscuits – these are body - building comestables.
  - b. Oranges, guavas, bananas, mangoes - these are types of fruit and good sources of vitamins and minerals.
5. It is used in printing and writing to indicate that a speaker is hesitating about what to say or thinking about the right word or way to put something across to his listener(s).

Examples:

- a. What I want to say is - em that our opponents - em are planning seriously - em on how to beat us.
- b. Do you mean - er that you'll - er repay me in this way?

### **The Ellipsis (...)**

This mark denotes the omission of certain words unrelated to the idea being expressed or considered irrelevant to a discourse. Three dots show that certain words are omitted.

### **The uses**

- i. It is used to avoid repetition of certain expressions or words considered unnecessary.

Examples:

- a. All you have said and how you have said it are acceptable us.—  
Without ellipsis
- b. All you have said... are acceptable to us.-with ellipsis

2. Ellipsis is also deployed to mark a thought expressed hesitantly, or thought “interrupted or left unfinished. “This punctuation is employed in a literary writing, particularly fiction. Example:

- a. I want to inform you.... But let's just act on my suggestion.-  
hesitation
- b. We will invade the.... Who are those people coming?-
- c. I am here as an emissary of.... (A blow at the temple stopped further statement)- unfinished expression

## **The Caret (^)**

This notation like the ellipsis and the apostrophe is used to indicate that some words are omitted. However, the omitted words indicated by the caret are not intentional. Oversight, writing speed distractions and similar words in the sentences may create the inadvertent omission of relevant words. The discovery of this non-inclusion makes the writer insert the sign of the caret at the appropriate place where the word(s) omitted should be. Atop this sign and above other co-texts or words of sentences' the left off word is written.

Examples:

I and my are forever guiltless. In this sentence the word “kingdom” is omitted. It should appear after ‘my’ and before I and my kingdom are forever guiltless.

## **The Words or Intra-Word Punctuation**

These are punctuation marks superimposed on words, emphasizing words, showing intra-word connection and to enclose words: the apostrophe shows which word possesses what; the hyphen indicates compounding of some words; the italics marks out texts mentioned while writing and other emphasized words; quotation marks- singles or doubles- enclose words uttered by a speaker.

## **The Apostrophe or Genitive (‘)**

This is a mark, which shows the omission of certain letters or words. The uses of this sign:

1. It is used to indicate contraction or shortening of some words that should rather have been written in their full forms:
  - a. We are - we’re
  - b. Cannot - can’t
  - c. Have not - haven’t

2. It is used as genitive, i.e. to show belongingness or possession or ownership or qualities/features of something.

The book of the boy —

The boy's book -

The house of his father -

His father's house

3. It denotes the plurals of letters and years.

-Dot your I's and cross your t's.

- In the 1960's, Harold Macmillan spoke of the "Wind – of-change" in African.

The apostrophe is relevant in writing since it makes a writer economical in the use of words. Instead of using too many words (verbosity), few are used. The instances used in number two above show that fewer words are used. It serves as a replacive: it replaces "of" in expressing ownership.

### **The Hyphen (-)**

This mark indicates a combination or connection of words or parts of words. This combination makes the word act as a whole and expresses a unit of meaning.

### **Uses**

1. It is used in syllabification, i.e. dividing a word into syllables at the end of a line. The hyphen links the syllables separated; Co-operation  
En-sur-ing La-bo-rious
2. It is used to combine two or three words to express a unit of meaning. The words so combined belong to the same parts of speech or word class. Good-for-nothing-adjective, Commander-in-chief-noun, Man-o'-war-noun, Never-to-be-forgotten-adjective

3. It is used to indicate bound morphs in words which would have created misinterpretation or confusion: Resign- gives up-without hyphen, Re-sign-sign again-with hyphen, Remark-say, note-without hyphen, Re-mark- mark again- with hyphen

(4) It is used to connect two elements when the letter (consonant or vowel) ending the first element is the same as the first letter (consonant or vowel) of the second element.

Examples:

Re-echo                      hall-lamp

Re-enter                     shell-like

Pre-eminent co-ordinate

(5) It is used to combine prefixes preceding words whose initial letters are always capitalized: Anti – Semitism, anti – Christ, Pro- American, Un-English

(6) It is used to combine words preceded by ill and ‘well’: ill-formed (ness), ill- mannered, Well- behaved

(7) It is used to state the fraction of whole numbers: A two – third majority, One-tenth

### **The Quotation Marks or Inverted Commas (“”) (“”)**

These are always in pairs of singles or doubles on sides of the enclosed words. These signs show that someone has uttered something using particular words. They also show that a person has actual words of speaker and so acknowledges such speaker

#### **Uses**

1. It is used to enclose a direct statement, i.e. the actual words used by speaker. Examples: “Friends, Romans, countrymen...” –Shakespeare, “Have you found me, oh, my enemy?” -Ahab

“That man is one of the strongest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself, and, now, he will be buried like a dog.” Obierika in *Things Fall Apart*

2. It is used to enclose quotations, i.e. the actual words of a writer or a speaker. Examples:
  - a. Dr Oji once remarked, “An English graduate without full knowledge of phonetics is the same as a medical practitioner without a full acknowledge of anatomy.”
  - b. Pope on “Essays on criticism” stressed,
    - i. ‘True ease in writing comes from art not chance.
    - ii. As those move easiest who have learned to dance’.
3. It is used to enclose the titles of books, poems, songs, articles, etc.

‘Casualties’ - poem

“Holy, Holy, Holy” - song

“Nigerian English: An untenable goal” – article

“Song of lawino” – a book

4. It is used to enclose a quotation within another quotation. Here, either of the marks – singles or doubles – can be used. If you chose to enclose the whole expression in singles, then the internal quote should take the doubles, or vice versa. Examples:

He said that “the love stricken Orland wrote a poem which runs thus: Hang here my verse in witness of my love”

**Note carefully:** commas, full stops, question marks may remain inside or outside the quotation marks: they remain “inside the closing inverted commas where they directly relate to the matter quoted. For example’ Pope says, “To err is human; to forgive is divine.” – Full stop inside “True ease in writing”, remarked Pope “is an art not chance.” -comma separating the first

part of the quote is enclosed in the closing inverted commas -again, the full stop ending the quote is equally enclosed. But where the full stop or other marks relate to the main body of the sentence it is placed outside the inverted commas. For instance, He says that “beauty is in the eyes of the beholder”. Macbeth lamented that he has been “tied to a stake... but bear – like “he” must fight the cause”.

### **The Italics**

The role of italics in handwriting is performed by underlining. A word or words attention to be called upon are underlined with a single line. Waldhorn and Zeiger say that italics “call attention to a word or words as being distinct from other words”. The distinction signified by italics is observed in printing.

### **Uses**

1. They are used to indicate titles of published works- books, plays, films, newspapers, magazines, etc

*Things Fall Apart* is about African culture in transition – book  
Shakespeare’s play, *Julius Caesar*, is the tragedy of Brutus- play

2. They are used to denote that a word or words in writing is foreign  
He approached them and said

*Comment a le vous?* – French, *Aboki*, I want this shoe mended.

3. They are used to indicate the names of ships, planes, etc

The officers and their crew with the ship, the *Titanic* vanished at the Bermuda Triangles. The ship, *NNS Bakassi* ran aground.

4. They are used to denote emphasized or contrasted words: This is my pen, Dot your ‘*T*’s and cross your *t*’s

The punctuation marks are necessary mechanics used in writing to make ones writing and reading meaningful. They enable a reader to pause (long or

short) and ponder over what he is reading. Perspicacity in introducing them in writing is a mark of a good writer. Nevertheless, the over-use of many of them will make one's writing flow like that of a school girl's.

## **Comprehending the Importance of the Elegance of Punctuation Notations**

### **Structural Elegance**

The end punctuation notations – full stop, question mark, exclamatory symbol- signal expression completion: the full stop signals information finality for statements; the question mark implies information seeking (indicated by wh- question) and information giving (indicated by yes-no question); the exclamatory sign gives emotional reaction to events. These notations engender needed understanding of expressions as meanings are projected via them; otherwise as Thurman (2002:14) reported, “when readers and writers don't use the same format-the same code-for applying capital letters and punctuation marks, confusion (emphasis mine) is often the result. Using the rules of the code enables you and your reader to understand the same things”. Understanding the same things suggest smooth flow of reading, permeating understanding, and satisfactory achievement, resultant after math of using these punctuation notations appropriately on relevant structures to convey intended messages.

### **Semantic Elegance**

Punctuation notations add meaning to writers' expression. The short pause marked by commas, the long pause introduced by full stops enable readers to pause briefly and ponder over what they read. Similarly, all other notation symbols are imbued with meanings as regards what is written. The direct question-'why' and yes. No-may require prompt response, while the rhetorical question is used to create effect on the readers or audience for it

requires not answer. The exclamatory symbol conveys remarkable emotional impression experienced by a writer or a narrator giving account of characters. Therefore, the choice and placing of punctuation marks [should aim] to bring out more clearly the author's thought" (Waldorn and Zeiger 1980); otherwise even where the sense (of a sentence) is perfectly clear, a sentence may be deprived of half of its force, its spirit, its point, by improper punctuation" Edgar in Ezugu (ed) 2001.

### **Stylistic Elegance**

(Literary) writing is laced with punctuation marks technically considered as pause or junctures. The smallest pause, equated with the comma, marks out boundary between words, and the longest pause equated with the terminal punctuation marks reflect the end point of a speech pattern.

The comma, or pause used within a line of verse is stylistically called the 'caesura'. The caesura slows reading tempo, and in most cases marks off parallel thoughts, e.g.

And when he falls [,] he falls like Lucifer [,] never hope  
to rise again. Shakespeare, *Henry viii*

The boxed commas represent caesura. They appear within the line and presents small pause; the full stop at the end represents long pause, and shows finality of the idea expressed. Also, literary writers make use of questions stylistically called rhetorical questions. Structural questions -wh-question, yes – no questions – require prompt answers, but on the other hand, rhetorical question are asked for effect. For instance, this Igbo traditional dirge demonstrates this style:

Death, death, death, what have we done?  
Young man dies  
Young woman dies  
Old woman dies

Death, what have we done?

### **Morphological Elegance**

Morphological gives the rules for the formation of words and for the understanding and descriptions of the internal structures of words. The hyphen and the apostrophe or genitive facilitate the formation or alteration of many words to reflect acceptable forms: hyphenated words or compounds, possessiveness of objects, as well as contracted or short forms of words are punctuation determinate.

Son-in-law                    - hyphenated  
Man-o-war  
John's father                    - genitives  
Nwafor's farm  
Can't, there's, she's    – short forms  
They'd she' d he'll

These are instances of morphological processes of English. They give elegance in the use of this language. The inelegant forms of omitting the genitive markers as well as the signs of contraction can be imagined: the hyphenated forms will become three words rather than one, the genitives will be read as plurals conflicting with real plurals, and the contracted forms will be any other expression and most conflicting with some English words.

Can't        – cant  
She's        – shes  
She'd        – shed  
He'll        – hell  
She'll        – shell

### **Phonological Elegance**

Pause and junctures, especially end and medial or internal punctuation marks, have inherent sound realization. In speech, this natural sound pattern, called intonation, must be observed; otherwise much of the intended

communication will be lost. Similarly, the natural speech melody characterizing these pauses will also be lost, and the speech becomes unnatural. A statement, a wh- question, an exclamatory expression naturally should have the pitch of voice falling at the end. Items in a list marked off by commas, yes – no questions constructed with auxiliary words, the first part(s) of complex clauses and expressions expressing doubts inherently admits the rising voice at the end. These are illustrations of hand – in – hand functional uses of syntax and phonology.

An important function of **intonation** according to Crystal (1992: 182) is a sign of grammatical structure, where it performs a role similar to **punctuation** in writing...

The two notable English intonation patterns are tuning one or the falling intonation and tune two or the rising intonation. These two major tunes together with their combinations are used on these grammatical structures indicated by the presence of these punctuation marks:

<b>Structure</b>	<b>Punctuation</b>	<b>intonation</b>
Statement/ Declaration	Full stop or period ends it	Receives tune I or the falling tune at the end
Question/ interrogation (wh. Question)	Question mark ends it	Receives tune I or the falling tune at the end
Command/ order	Full stop ends it	Receives tune I at the end
Exclamation	Exclamatory mark ends it!	Receives tune I at the end
Requests	End in question marks	Takes the rising tune or tune 2 at the end
Polar question or yes- no question (questions begin with aux. verbs)	Ends in a question marks	Takes the rising tune or tune 2 at the end
Statement turned question	Ends in a question mark	Takes tune 2 at the end
Items in a list	Receive commas and full stop i.e. the items are marked off	Takes tune 2 and tune 1, i.e. the items receive tune 2 and

	by commas and the last takes a full stop	the last receives tune 1
Non-basic or non-kernel sentences: complex, compound, multiple	The initial clauses or groups may be marked off by commas, semi-colons, colons, parentheses/ brackets	The initial or non-final clauses take rising tunes or tune 2, the final clauses receive tune 1

Nevertheless, these similar perceptible realizations do not imply that both of these graphic and acoustic notations are in free variations. Certain emphasis on any of the words in these natural structures may influence the normal tunes of a structure.

### **Capitalization**

The letters of the alphabet have two forms: small (lower case) and big (upper case). The conventional symbols representing them differ. These differences affect their linear appearance in forming words. In connected speech, therefore, natural preferential choice of one to the other is maintained in conformity with the acceptable norms in writing. The small letters are generally used; the capital ones are intermittently employed in obedience to laid down convention.

1. Begin sentences with capital letters:

**O**ne day a girl was playing on a busy street. **H**er ball rolled into the middle of the road and she ran after it. **A**t that moment a motorcar came dashing round the corner. **A** passerby saw the girl's danger and ran quickly to her aid. **F**ortunately he saved her from serious injury. Angus Maciver  
The bold capital letters in this passage each begins a sentence and each marks a quality of a sentence by beginning with a capital letter.

2. The pronoun 'I' must always be written in capital wherever it occurs: at the beginning, middle or end of sentences: "I am who I am"

3. Initial letters of proper nouns or names (special names) are always written in capital whether they appear at the beginning, middle or end of sentences.

Proper nouns are particular names denoting a person, place or thing.

a. Names of persons - John Okafor, Julie Coker, James Joyce, Daniel Orteger, etc

b. Names of markets and market days

Afor, Eke, Oye, Nkwo, etc

c. Names of days in a week:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday

d. Names months:

January, February, December.

e. Names of rivers, seas, oceans, lakes, etc

River Niger, River Benue, Caspian Sea, Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, Lake Chad, etc

f. Names of mountains, hills, Plateaux:

Mount Everest, Cameron Mountain, Udi Hills, Obudu Plateau, Jos Plateau, etc

g. Names of schools: Primary, Post- primary, tertiary:

Awgu Town School, National High School, Awka, College of Education, Nsugbe, Federal Polytechnics, Okoh, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, etc

H. Capitalize initial names of magazines and newspapers:

Newswatch, Tell, Guardian, the Sun, etc

I. Names of races:

African, Semitics, Red Indians, Australians, the Caucasians, etc

J. Names of notable events in history: the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade or the Triangular Slave Trade, the Aba Women Riot, the Coal- Mining Shooting of 1949, etc

k. Names of clubs or social organizations and associations (Political), etc Egbeli Social Club, Women Aid Collectives (WACO), People’s Democratic Party, etc

4. Begin direct speech with a capital letter. Direct speech is the actual words of a speaker: King David said: “Let not this matter trouble you. The sword destroys now one and now another” ‘L’ begins the speech and it is capitalized.

5. Begin any word – He, Him, His – referring to God, Holy Spirit, Christ with capitals:

i. The Holy Spirit led **Him** to the wilderness. – Christ (Him)

ii. The Holy Spirit will guide you and **He** will tell you what to say. –

Holy Spirit: He

iii. On the first day **He** created heaven and earth. – God: He

6. Capitalize the first letters of the word beginning the titles of a book, articles, plays, films and other first letters of other content words:

i. Books:

\* Things Fall Apart

\* Tell Freedom

\* The Mayor of Casterbridge

ii. Plays:

\* The Trial of Brother Jero

\* King Lear

iii. Poems:

\* Nightfall in Soweto

\* Night

iv. Articles:

\* Nigerian English: An Untenable Goal

\* Spoken English or Spoken Nigerian English: Which Option for Nigerian schools?

7. Capitalize names of religious denominations:

Christianity, Muslim, Budhist, Confucianism, Yogi, etc

8. Capitalize first letters beginning salutations and addresses:

Dear Sir/ Sir

Dear Madam/Madam

} Capitalized  
} Salutation letters

National Grammar School

Awka

PMB 1000

Anambra State

} Capitalized Addresses

9. Capitalize north, south, east and west only when they refer to recognized names for areas:

- The sun rises from the **east** and sets in the **west**.

- Civilization started from the **East** and was stolen by the **West**.

10. The initial letters of titles of a person should be capitalized: Dr. Okorie, Chief Okeke, Sir Okoma, Prof. Mgbafo, etc

11. The initial letters beginning dialects of any types should be capitalized:

Fula, Fulfide, Igbo, Italian, Russian, etc.

### **Conclusion**

Punctuation must be bound to communication, in so doing, it trails the thought of the writer: breaking up of ideas is introduced by the comma; ending an idea is marked by the period; seeking information or giving one is indicated by the direct question; expressing emotion is denoted by

exclamation mark; caret shows missing information supplied, as well as numerous other suggestions these notation are intended to convey. Reading through sentences (texts) is going through the thought of a writer projected by the use of inherent punctuation symbols deliberately inserted to draw out intended meaning. Thus, the writer-reader comprehension of the importance of punctuation is inevitable. “The writer, who neglects punctuation or mispunctuates, is liable to be misunderstood; this, according to popular idea, is the sum of the evils arising from heedlessness or carelessness”. Edgar in Ezugu (ed) 2001.

To punctuate a speech with cheers; to punctuate one’s remarks with anecdotes are expressions showing endearment to an audience and expertise in lacing one’s subject with mechanics of writing and speech. A good writer; a good speaker obeys this counseling:

Try to practice every day, even if for just a few minutes.  
As one textbook puts it, ‘a little and often’ is preferable  
to ‘a lot but seldom’. - Awake

## Reference

- A British Correspondent. "Do you learn a foreign Language", Awake January 2000.
- Crystal, David. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1985 Rpt 1992.
- Eyisi, Joy. *A Grammar of English: The Student's Companion*, Rex Charles and Patrick Ltd, Nimo, Anambra State, rvd 2006.
- Ezugu, M. Amadihe (ed). *Fundamentals of English Language and Literature for Tertiary Institutions*, School of General Studies, IMT, Enugu 2001.
- Hornby, A.S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, The Language Book Society and Oxford Univ. Press, 1974.
- Joned, Daniels. *An Outline of English Phonetics*. Heffer, Cambridge, 1981.
- Maciver, Angus. *The New First Aid in English*. Robert Gibson Publishers, 17 Fitzroy Place, Glasgow G3 7SF, May 1978.
- Ogbazi, Ifeyinwa J, Osakwe, Nneka N and Ekpunobi, Dolly C. *English for Communicative Competence*, John Jacob's Classic Publishers Ltd, Enugu, 2003
- Oji, Nzebunachi. *English Grammar for Advanced Students*, Pacific Publishers Ltd, 1988 rpt 1994.
- Waldhorn, Arthur and Zeiger, Arthur. *English Made Simple*, W.H. Allen London, 1980.
- The Rapid Results College. English Language, Course No. 447b, Tuition House, London S.W. 19.
- Tracy, R.D. *Dictionary of Correct English*, Times Educational Company Ltd. 7A Melbroune Industrial Building, Hong Kong, 1980.