

Apostrophes

In contractions – but do not use in formal writing	It's difficult. / Where's the report? / It isn't hot today.
Used to show possession (to replace 'of' or 'from') and it goes after the word it refers to . . . BUT don't use apostrophes for the possessive 'its'	Debts of 1 bank > the bank's debts Debts of 2 or more banks > the banks' debts Revenue is updating its website.
For time phrases, when the time modifies a noun	In one day's time / three days' time / 8 days' holiday

Capital letters

For names of places and people, job titles, defined terms, and proper nouns such as product names & trademarks.	The Head of Corporate Affairs showed us around the new Google building in south Dublin. The District Court is closed for Christmas.
Do not use to show that a word is important	If you're unsure, consult a style guide.

Commas

For clarity, read a sentence aloud and add a comma where you pause for breath	If Eric James is elected, his main opposition will not come from Republicans.
To separate items in a list, except penultimate one	He photocopied reports, memos and an invitation.
If you have inserted a clause to provide extra information – but make sure the sentence still makes sense if the clause is removed	Despite living in Wexford, where she worked, she went to Dublin for the appointment.
After introductory words or phrases	In addition, we . . . / However, it was not . . .

Hyphens

For two-digit numbers written out	twenty-two / fifty-one / ninety-nine
When you use numbers as adjectives	a three-year-old PC / a 30-minute meeting
For compound adjectives placed before the noun (but not for proper nouns)	an up-to-date record / a long-term issue / a tax-efficient solution / Health Service Executive staff will . . .
When there could be confusion of meaning	to react vs. to re-act / to reform vs. to re-form
For compound nouns – but not usually for compound verbs	He went for a medical check-up. The manager will check up on staff regularly.

Semicolons

To separate long items in a list, particularly if individual items in the list include commas	Punctuation marks include the full stop, which is the strongest pause; the semicolon, which is weaker; and the comma, which is the weakest of all.
To separate two phrases in a sentence, where the information is so closely linked that you don't want to use two sentences (but both phrases must have the grammar of independent clauses)	The cat played the piano; the girl laughed. The CEO made a speech; the shareholders were not impressed.