25 Punctuation: apostrophes, colons, commas etc.

25.1 apostrophes (')

1. The main use of the apostrophe is to form the genitive (2). The only other use is if you want to make it clear to the reader how a word is constructed.

2. Do not use an apostrophe to make Acronyms and dates plural.

3. Contracted forms are not generally used in research manuscripts.

	YES	NOT RECOMMENDED
1	In my email I **cc'd** the co-authors who all have **PhD's**. cc'd = carbon copied	In my email I **ccd** the co-authors who all have **PhDs**.
1	A common mistake with the word 'aardvark' is to forget that it begins with two **A's**.	A common mistake with the word 'aardvark' is to forget that it begins with two **As**.
2	We bought six **PCs**.	We bought six **PC's**.
2	Our institute was founded in the 198**0s**.	Our institute was founded in the 198**0's**.
3	**Let us** now turn to Theorem 2, where we **will** learn that **it is** essential to …	**Let's** now turn to Theorem 2, where **we'll** learn that **it's** essential to …
3	The experiment **cannot / could not** be repeated.	The experiment **can't / couldn't** be repeated.

25.2   colons (:)

1. The most common use of a colon in a research paper is to introduce a list.

2. Use a colon to divide up a two-part title of a paper or presentation. The word following the colon can either be capitalized or not. In such cases, a dash (25.5) could be used instead of a colon.

3. Avoid using a colon to add further thoughts or explanations if this will avoid creating an unnecessarily long sentence.

4. A colon may be useful to highlight a contrast, again providing this does not create a long sentence.

	YES	ALSO POSSIBLE
1	The following countries were involved in the **treaty: Turkey**, Armenia …	
2	Communicative language **teacher: The** state of the art	Ethical management in **banking – does** the presence of females make the difference?
	Space **debris: the** need for new regulations	
3	This problem was first identified in the **1990s: in** the Sudan it was not noticed until 2013.	This problem was first identified in the **1990s. In** the Sudan it was not noticed until 2013 and in fact this led to serious problems with …
4	X can be used as an **identifier: Y** cannot.	X can be used as an **identifier. Y** cannot.

25.3   commas (,): usage

Commas should be used in the following situations:

1. To separate two dependent clauses. This is often the case with clauses introduced by *if, when, as soon as, after* etc.

2. To avoid initial confusion on the part of the reader. For example, in the NO example it initially seems that the water boils the specimen.

3. After sentences that begin with an adverb that is designed to attract the reader's attention (e.g. *clearly, interestingly*) or a link word that indicates you are adding further information or talking about a consequence (e.g. *consequently, in addition*).

4. In non-defining relative clauses (7.2.2).

5. If you have a list more than two items use a comma before *and* (13.4). The comma highlights that the penultimate and last element are separate items.

	YES	NO
1	When the specimen is **dry, remove** it from the recipient.	When the specimen is **dry remove** it from the recipient.
2	If the water **boils, the** specimen will be ruined.	If the water boils **the specimen** will be ruined.
3	**Surprisingly,** the results were not in agreement with any of the hypotheses. **Moreover,** in many cases they were the exact opposite of what had been expected.	**Surprisingly** the results were not in agreement with any of the hypotheses. **Moreover** in many cases they were the exact opposite of what had been expected.
4	The **Thames,** which runs through **London,** is England's longest river.	The Thames **which runs through London** is England's longest river.
5	There are three advantages of this: costs are lower, deadlines and other constraints are more easily **met, and** customers are generally happier.	There are three advantages of this: costs are lower, deadlines are more easily **met and** customers are generally happier.

25.4   commas (,): non usage

Commas should be avoided or limited if the sentence contains:

1. Twenty words or more. Consider rearranging the sentence or writing two separate sentences.

2. A series of very short phrases all separated by commas. Consider rearranging the sentence into longer phrases with fewer commas.

3. A long a list of items, which itself contains subgroups. It is better to use semicolons (25.11.12) to separate the various subgroups.

4. A series of nouns and the first and second noun are not related. Instead, begin a new sentence after the first noun, otherwise the reader will think that the nouns are all part of the same series.

5. In a defining relative clause (7.2.1).

	YES	NO
1	If the iodine solution does not turn to this color when added to a **food, this** indicates that starch is not present in the food.	**If, when** the iodine solution is added to **food, it** does not turn this **color, this** indicates that starch is not present in the food.
1	This application was developed specifically for this purpose. It can be used on most platform**s, f**or example XTC and B4M**E. It** can also be used with …	This application**, which** was developed specifically for this purpose**, can** be used on most platform**s f**or example XTC and B4M**E, it** can also be used with …
2	If Y is installed before **X, this** may cause damage.	Damage may be caused if X is installed **after, rather** than **before, the** installation of Y.
		If Y is installed **before, rather** than **after, installing Y, then** this may cause damage.
3	We used various sets of characters: A, B and **C; D**, E and **F; and** X, Y and Z.	We used various sets of characters: A, B and C, D, E and F and X, Y and Z.
4	Each row in the page represents an individual **record. The** information and the features provided enable the user to control, monitor and edit the records created.	Each row in the page represents an individual **record, the** information and the features provided enable the user to control, monitor and edit the records created.
5	The **student that** gets the top marks is awarded the prize.	The **student, that** gets the top marks is awarded the prize.

25.5   dashes (_)

Use a dash:

1. To avoid excess use of commas or brackets / parentheses in explanations. It is stronger than two commas, but lighter than parentheses. However it would usually be better to split up the sentence into smaller parts.

2. For afterthoughts to a final comment.

	YES	BETTER ALTERNATIVE
1	Taking this process into account, we would expect undesirable products – that is, unneeded doses (large pairs of isomers) – to form in the donor atoms.	Taking this process into account, we would expect undesirable products to form in the donor atoms. These products consist of unneeded doses, i.e. large pairs of isomers.
2	X does not, in fact, correspond to Y – and this is what we had suspected.	X does not correspond to Y. In fact, this is what we had suspected.
		X does not correspond to Y, thus confirming our suspicions.

25.6   hyphens (-): part 1

Use a hyphen when you:

1. Join two nouns together to form an adjective to describe another noun. Note: do not use a plural *s* on the noun that is acting as an adjective.

2. Use a word that acts as a prefix to the following word.

3. Have a series of prefixes referring to the same noun.

4. Prefix a word with *non* – this is not a rule and not all authors follow it.

5. Prefix a capitalized noun.

6. Refer to mixtures and analyses that combine two elements.

	YES	NO
1	A 30-**year**-old patient with one **six-fingered** hand.	A **30 years old** patient with one **six-fingers** hand.
2	To avoid **time-consuming** decisions, we used **row-based** flashing.	To avoid **time consuming** decisions, we used **row based** flashing.
3	Control of the interaction is **user-** not **application-**driven.	Control of the interaction is **user** not **application** driven.
4	These are **non-essential** items.	
	These are **non essential** items.	
	These are **nonessential** items.	
5	They made an assessment of soil depletion in **sub-Saharan** Africa.	They made an assessment of soil depletion in **sub Saharan** Africa.
6	We used **chemical-physical** analyses to determine the relative values in the **hydrogen-oxygen** mixture.	We used **chemical physical** analyses to determine the relative values in the **hydrogen oxygen** mixture.

25.7   hyphens (-): part 2

Use a hyphen when you:

1. Join a noun to a preposition (*clean-up, back-up*), but do not to join a verb to a preposition (*to clean up, to back up*).

2. Need to clarify any ambiguity.

3. Note: nouns, adjectives and prepositions only need to be joined together by a hyphen when in combination they act as adjectives that describe the following noun. If there is no following noun, then no hyphens are required (though this rule is frequently ignored).

	YES	NO
1	When the machine is **started up**, make sure … This feature is only available at **start-up**.	When the machine is **started-up**, make sure …
2	This is a little **used-car**. A second-hand car that is small in size. This is a **little-used** car. A car that has been rarely driven.	This is a **little used car**.
3	We present three **state-of-the-art solutions** to this **well-known** problem.	We present three **state of the art solutions** to this **well known** problem.
3	Automatic translation: the **state of the art**	Automatic translation: **the state-of-the art**

25.8   parentheses ( )

When readers see a phrase in parentheses, they may assume that the information contained therein is not very important. Don't use parentheses when it would be less distracting for the reader if you used a separate phrase. Use parentheses:

1. With acronyms and abbreviations. Put the full form outside the parentheses, and the acronym inside.

2. To give examples in the form of short lists, when this list appears in the middle of the phrase.

3. If a parenthesis appears at the end of a sentence, the period (.) should come after the parenthesis.

For more details on the types and usage of brackets see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bracket.

	YES	NO
1	This is based on a **first in first out (FIFO)** policy.	This is based on a **FIFO (first in first out)** policy.
2	This is only true of three **countries (**i.e. Libya, Syria and Jordon**) and** for the purposes our study can be ignored.	This is only true of three **countries i.e.** Libya, Syria and **Jordon and** for the purposes our study can be ignored.
3	If there is no following noun, then no hyphens are required (though this rule is frequently **ignored).**	If there is no following noun, then no hyphens are required (though this rule is frequently **ignored.)**

25.9   periods (.)

1. Periods are not normally used at the end of titles or headings.

2. Periods are used in captions after the words Figure, Table etc., and in the related captions themselves.

3. If a word like *etc.* appears at the end of a sentence it only requires one period.

4. A set of three (or more) periods can be used to indicate that the preceding items are just some examples and there may be others. Using *e.g.* and *etc.* as well as the three dots is not necessary.

	YES	NO
1	A model for assessing the level of complexity in a **manuscript**	A model for assessing the level of complexity in a **manuscript.**
1	Materials and **Methods**	Materials and **Methods.**
2	Figure **1**. Transgene **structure.** Schematic representation of the fragment microinjected into the **nuclei.**	Figure **1** Transgene **structure** Schematic representation of the fragment microinjected into the **nuclei**
3	Various grammatical points are covered: tenses, adjectives, agreement **etc.**	Various grammatical points are covered: tenses, adjectives, agreement **etc..**
4	Various languages can be used **(C++, Java, …)** on most types of hardware **(IBM, Apple, …).**	Various languages can be used **(e.g. C++, Java, …)** on most types of hardware **(IBM, Apple, … etc).**
	= Various languages can be used **(e.g. C++ and Java)**, and most types of hardware **(e.g. IBM and Apple).**	

25.10 quotation marks (' ')

Check to see if your journal uses single ('....') or double ("....") quotation marks. The rules for directly quoting the work of other authors vary from discipline to disciple and journal to journal

Below are just some examples.

1. If the quotation is short, incorporate it into the main text.

2. If the quotation is long, begin a new paragraph and indent the paragraph.

3. Another use of quotation marks is to enclose words and phrases that you have used in a special way. Use single quotations in such cases.

	YES	ALTERNATIVE
1	Wallwork states "A maximum of 20 words should be used per sentence" (Wallwork 2014). This implies that …	According to Wallwork (2014) "A maximum of 20 words should be used per sentence." This implies that …
1	To determine "the best way to respond to referees without aggravating them" (Wallwork 2015) we devised a study based on a database of 476 replies to referees reports.	In order to determine what Wallwork (2015) posits as "the best way to respond to referees without aggravating them", we devised a study based on a database of 476 replies to referees reports.
2	In her seminal work, Southern begins by saying: blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah …	
3	We call this phenomenon 'venting', which is a variation of the so-called 'wind synergism'.	

25.11 semicolons (;)

1. Use semicolons in lists that contain a series of phrases.

2. Use semicolons to make it clear which elements belong together in a series of lists.

3. Use semicolons to create a longer pause in the reader's assimilation of the sentence. This device should only be used rarely, given that it is likely to lead to the creation of a long sentence.

4. Do not join two independent clauses with a semicolon. Instead, make two simple, separate sentences.

	YES	AVOID
1	Substances are transported in living organisms as: (1) solutions of soluble **nutrients;** (2) solids in the form of food **particles;** (3) gases such as …	Substances are transported in living organisms as: (1) solutions of soluble **nutrients,** (2) solids in the form of food **particles,** (3) gases such as …
1	Figure 1. Three types of classroom arrangements: *a*, **traditional;** *b*, **circle;** *c*, U-shaped.	Figure 1. Three types of classroom arrangements: *a*, **traditional,** *b*, **circle,** *c*, U-shaped.
2	Several countries are participating in the project, in the following groups: Spain, Cuba and **Argentina; France**, Morocco and Senegal; and the Netherlands and Indonesia.	Several countries are participating in the project, in the following groups: Spain, Cuba and **Argentina, France**, Morocco and Senegal, and the Netherlands and Indonesia.
3	Sensory inputs merely modulate that **experiment; they** do not directly cause it.	
	Used here to create contrast between 'modulate' and 'cause'.	
3	The pitfalls described in this article have been known for many **years; our** work attempts to solve them.	
	Connects previous knowledge of Xs with author's own explanation of them.	
4	Users can search the entire **database. There is also a** special alert mechanism to inform administrators …	Users can search the entire **database; a** special alert mechanism is also provided that informs that administrator …