

For Parenthesis, Use Commas, Dashes or Brackets

A parenthesis is separated from the rest of the sentence by commas, dashes or brackets (all called parentheses). When a parenthesis is completely removed, the sentence is still grammatically correct. (Try reading each sentence below with its parenthesis removed.)

Examples (parenthesis in bold):

▶ Jamie Buxton, **who fainted in church during his wedding**, apologized to his wife by booking two tickets to New York. ✓

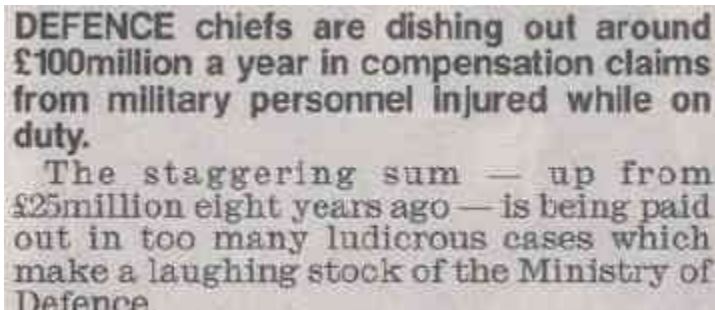
(The parentheses chosen by the writer were commas. However, brackets or dashes could equally have been used.)

▶ At Midnight last night, Skip **(a guard dog for Bonds Ltd in Bury)** hospitalized two burglars before returning to eat the steaks they had thrown him. ✓

(The writer has chosen brackets, because there is already a comma in the sentence.)

▶ Dave Jenkins' best friend, **Adam Wright-Smith**, stabbed him through the heart whilst testing a knife-proof jacket; Dave is expected to make a full recovery. ✓

(The writer has chosen commas, possibly because there are already two hyphens in the sentence, and dashes look similar to hyphens.)



dashes used for parenthesis
(newspaper article)

However, As a Result

Inserted comments such as 'however', 'therefore', 'as a result', 'as far as I am concerned', 'for all intents and purposes', 'subsequently', 'so to speak', etc. fall into the category of parenthesis too. (As a rule, brackets are not used with these.)

Examples:

▶ The slow cooker I purchased at your store is, for all intents and purposes, utterly useless. ✓

▶ Darius, on the other hand, writes his own songs. ✓

▶ It rained all day and, as a result, the hut collapsed. ✓

▶ On a happier note, her latest song — Wind Me Up Baby — is, according to

those in the know, expected to enter the charts in the top 5. ✓
("Wind Me Up Baby" is parenthesis, and so is "according to those in the know". Try reading the sentence with them removed. It still makes sense.)

Note



PARENTHESIS?

A parenthesis adds more information to a sentence:

- ▶ Kent Oliver won his first race on Tuesday.
(There is no parenthesis in this example.)
- ▶ Kent Oliver — the only professional jockey from Jersey — won his first race on Tuesday.
(The words "the only professional jockey from Jersey" add more information. In this example, the parenthesis is between two dashes.)
- ▶ Mel Blanc, the voice of Bugs Bunny, was allergic to carrots.
(The words "the voice of Bugs Bunny" add more information. In this example, the parenthesis is between two commas.)

Hot Tip



HELP — WHICH ONE?

It is your choice whether to use commas, brackets or dashes for parentheses. Below are some guidelines:

- ▶ **Dashes** — parenthesis easily seen, but dashes look a little stark
- ▶ **Commas** — normal looking sentence, but commas are often confused with other commas in the sentence
- ▶ **Brackets** — parenthesis easily seen, but brackets make official letters look a little unorganized

Beware



END THE PARENTHESIS

Always remember to end a parenthesis. When using commas or dashes, writers often forget to end the parenthesis. This is as

wrong as not closing a pair of brackets.

- ▶ Danny, however had sharp features and greasy hair. ✗
(another comma required after "however")
- ▶ The zander — one of the fastest fish in British waters often school together around the edges of lakes. ✗
(another dash required after 'waters')

Note



PARENTHESIS IN APPOSITION

The term 'in apposition' just means 'the same'. When a parenthesis is the same thing as whatever it follows, it is called 'parenthesis in apposition'.

- ▶ Kent Oliver — the only professional jockey from Jersey — won his first race on Tuesday.
(Kent Oliver is the professional jockey. This is parenthesis in apposition.)
- ▶ At midnight last night, Skip (a guard dog for Bonds Ltd in Bury) hospitalised two intruders who broke in the company yard.
(Skip is the guard dog. This is parenthesis in apposition.)
- ▶ Jamie Buxton, who fainted in church during his wedding, apologized to his wife...
(This is not parenthesis in apposition.)