

TYPES OF BRACKETS

Punctuation

ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC SUPPORT



www.mun.ca/writingcentre

PARENTHESES ()

Parentheses (singular parenthesis), or round brackets, are the most commonly used brackets in writing.

Parentheses are used:

- To surround numbers or letters that denote items in a formal list
- To set off supplementary or nonessential material within sentences

1. FORMAL LISTS:

When writing a formal list, parentheses are used to enclose numbers or letters that denote the listed items.

For the exam, students are required to bring either (a) their student ID, (b) a driver's license, or (c) another piece of government issued identification.

Chapter three covers (1) the different types of cells, (2) the different structures of cells, and (3) the different functions of cells.

Note: Commas usually appear *after* parentheses; however, in lists, they may appear before them.

2. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Parentheses are used to provide additional information that is not essential to the main sentence. Such material may serve to clarify the main point, to add a relevant detail, or even to provide an interesting comment.

Parentheses function like dashes, but unlike dashes, they de-emphasize the information contained within them.

Charlotte Brontë's novels (particularly *Jane Eyre*) contained obvious feminist messages.

The battle of Waterloo (1815) brought an end to Napoleon's dominance over Europe.

Note: If the parenthetical information is contained within a larger sentence, it should not begin with a capital letter or end with a period (even if it is, in itself, a complete sentence).

If the parenthetical element appears at the end of a sentence, the final punctuation should appear *after* the closing parenthesis.

The lecture was about torque (rotational force). However, if the parenthetical information is written as a separate sentence, it should be punctuated as such with the period *before* the closing parenthesis.

Her answer is incorrect. (The correct answer is two.)



SQUARE BRACKETS []

Square brackets are used to modify quotations. Square brackets are necessary to mark places where adjustments were made to cited materials.

Square brackets are used:

- To modify quotations to make them fit grammatically in a sentence
- To insert explanatory material into a quotation
- To replace a pronoun in a quotation with a noun for clarity
- To omit material from a long quotation
- To highlight a mistake in a cited phrase

Compare the quotation below to the following modified examples:

“In 1921, Sir Frederick G Banting, Charles H Best and JJR Macleod discovered insulin making it possible to treat the previously incurable type 1 diabetes. They were aided in their research by a biochemist named James Collip, who purified the treatment. The discovery revolutionized modern medicine saving the lives of countless people who are affected by the disease.”



1. GRAMMAR MODIFICATIONS:

Sometimes it may be necessary to add letters or words to a quote to make it grammatically correct.

Square brackets can be used to change the tense of a word that disagrees with the rest of a sentence or to alter the capitalization of a word.

Original quote:

“In 1921, Sir Frederick G Banting, Charles H Best and JJR Macleod discovered insulin **making** it possible to treat the previously incurable type 1 diabetes.”

Modified quote:

The discovery of “insulin **ma[de]** it possible to treat the previously incurable type 1 diabetes”.

Original: “**The** discovery revolutionized modern medicine”.

Modified: According to the author, “[**t**]he discovery revolutionized modern medicine”.

2. ADDING EXPLANATORY MATERIAL:

Square brackets can also be useful to clarify a quotation. Adding an explanation can help make the quote’s message clearer.

Using the same quote as above:

“In 1921, Sir Frederick G Banting, Charles H Best and JJR Macleod discovered insulin [**a hormone created by the pancreas that regulates blood sugar**] making it possible to treat the previously incurable type 1 diabetes.”

3. REPLACING PRONOUNS:

Square brackets can also be used to clarify a term expressed as a pronoun.

Original quote: “**They** were aided in their research by a biochemist named James Collip, who purified the treatment.”

Modified quote: “[**Sir Frederick G Banting, Charles H Best and JJR Macleod**] were aided in their research by a biochemist named James Collip, who purified the treatment.”

(Here, the pronoun *they* was replaced by the names of the men who made the discovery.)

4. OMITTING PARTS OF A QUOTATION:

Square brackets are also used to omit words from a quotation. To remove words from a quotation, enclose an ellipsis (...) between square brackets.

“In 1921, Sir Frederick G Banting, Charles H Best and JJR Macleod discovered insulin making it possible to treat the previously incurable type 1 diabetes. [...] The discovery revolutionized modern medicine saving the lives of countless people who are affected by the disease.”

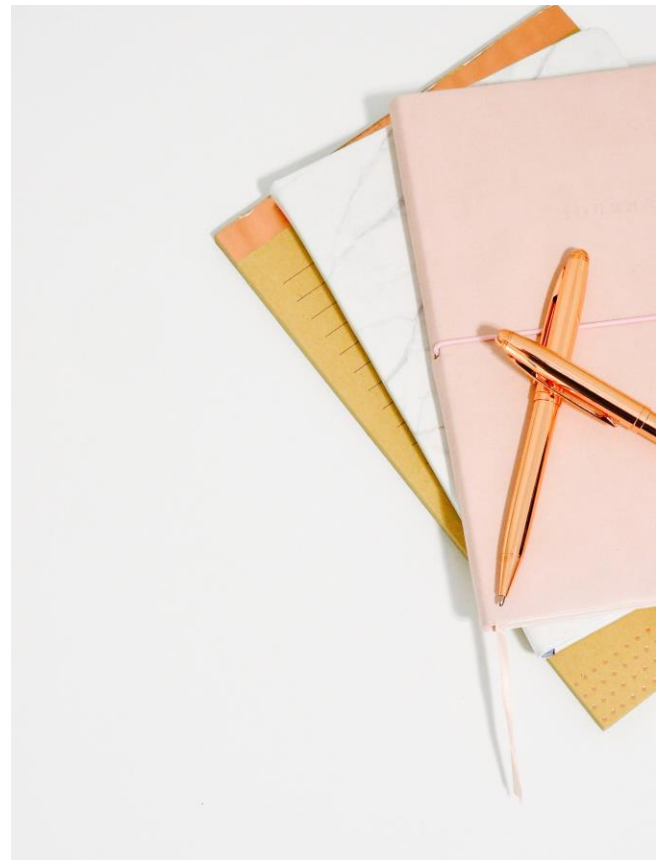
(Here the second sentence of the original quote was left out.)

5. HIGHLIGHTING MISTAKES IN QUOTATIONS:

Square brackets can also be used to call attention to an error in an original quotation. Enclose the Latin word *sic* (meaning *thus*, or *such*) in square brackets directly after the mistake to acknowledge that error was in the original writing.

“The new policy **effected** [**sic**] the way the public received information.”

The quote should read: “The new policy *affected* the way the public received information.”



BRACES { }

Braces, or curly brackets, have many functions in math and computer programming but are rarely used in English grammar. In general, they are used to group the terms contained within them.

Braces can be used:

- To insert a list of equal options into a sentence
- To present a number set

1. LISTS OF EQUAL OPTIONS:

Braces can be used, on rare occasions, to present a list of options. Options presented within braces are all equivalent and the choices listed should be exhaustive (i.e., every option should be listed).

He was given a selection of topics to write about **{The Second World War, The Cuban Missile Crisis, The Cold War, 9/11}**.

2. NUMBER SETS:

Like lists, number sets can be offset by braces. This is more commonly used in math than in English.

Positive, even numbers from 1 to 10 are as follows: **{2, 4, 6, 8, 10}**.

Sources:

(MLA 8th Edition)

"100 years of insulin". *Diabetes UK*.

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/research/research-impact/insulin>

"Linguistic Notation Conventions". *Universität Bremen*. https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/fachbereiche/fb10/fb10/pdf/e-sc/notation-conventions.pdf

Hogue, Ann. *Essentials of English: A Writer's Handbook*. Pearson Education, 2003

Reinking, James. A, et al. *Strategies for Successful Writing: A Rhetoric, Research Guide, Reader, and Handbook, Sixth Canadian Edition*. Pearson Canada Inc, 2017

CHEVRONS < >

Chevrons, or angle brackets, are rarely used in English writing. They may be used singularly (< >) or in pairs (« »). In languages such as French and Russian, they are often used as quotation marks.

Chevrons can be used:

- To mark an aside thought
- To present orthographic letters in linguistics

1. ASIDE THOUGHTS:

Very rarely, chevrons can be used to present an aside thought (a character's verbalization of their thoughts to the audience/reader).

"We should get together again sometime soon." «**If I have to spend another minute making conversation with her, I'm going to lose my mind!**»

2. ORTHOGRAPHIC LETTERS:

In linguistics, orthographic letters (or graphemes) are sequences of letters that represent a single sound. They are often presented between singular angle brackets.

The word *ship* begins with the **<sh>** sound.

Contact us

Writing Centre SN-2053

writing@mun.ca

709-864-3168