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## **The Role of the Correct Placement of Punctuation in**

### **Enhancing the Students' Academic Writing**

Case study: Master One Students of English at Biskra University.

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Sciences of the Language

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**DEDICATION**

*To my parents, the dearest people to my heart, and to my  
family and friends.*

*I dedicate my work to my secondary school teacher Mr.  
Ben Ali Nabil, thank you for all your encouragements.*

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## **Abstract**

This work aims at illustrating the important role of punctuation marks in academic writing. It shows how the proper use of punctuations precisely, the comma, full stop, colon, semicolon, apostrophe, question mark, and the exclamation mark, would help in conveying the exact meaning and maintaining organization in academic writing. Through the hypothesis, we intended to show the role of correct placement of punctuations in enhancing the students' academic writing. Our hypotheses have been confirmed by the students' and teachers' questionnaires. A questionnaire was given to thirty five master one students of English as a sample, and another questionnaire was administered to five teachers of written expression, at the English section, university of Biskra. Besides, we have analyzed ten copies of the students' written expression exam essays. The gained results in the students' and teachers' questionnaires were contradictive to the students' performance in their essays. In the questionnaire, students seem to be aware of the importance of punctuation. Yet, they did not have a proper use of punctuation marks in their essays.

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**List of Abbreviations**

BA : Licence

MA : Master/ Magister

PhD : Doctorate

EFL: English as Foreign Language

%: Percentage

N: Number

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## **Introduction**

Writing is not merely using a pen on a paper, or typing thoughts on a computer. Writing is one means to represent the language in a visual form. As speaking, writing has structures, such as vocabulary, grammar, and semantics. However, it is different from the spoken form. Writing is an indirect language used for communication among human beings, in which the reader would receive the message in a written form. Written products can differ, depending on the writer's intention or objective. Hence, the most important types of writings are five: narrative, descriptive, prescriptive, expository, and persuasive writing. In order to produce meaningful and organized written products, the student should follow certain steps, such as drafting, editing, revising, and proofreading.

In the academic realm, university students have to conduct researches by using formal writing. Academic writing includes written assignments, whether writing paragraphs, essays, and even dissertations. Writing academically is not an easy task since this language skill has many rules and instructions that should be followed.

Punctuation is one of the important aspects of written English. A poor punctuation makes it tough for the reader to understand the exact meaning of a written product. Any kind of misuse, or ignorance, of punctuation marks may change the meaning and create a misunderstanding between the addresser and the addressee. Punctuation marks are one of the writing tools, which allow the writer to express his attitude and impression. In other words, it is a medium to give a clear assumption about the written product. The essence of punctuation is not when it is visible while reading; instead, when it is applied correctly and fulfilled its function.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Academic writing and punctuation marks are interrelated. Regardless of the message conveyed by the written letters, punctuation marks are indispensable keys for the clarification and organization of a written work. Furthermore, punctuation would alter the meaning of a thought , if it is put incorrectly.

This study is an attempt to investigate the role of the correct placement of punctuation marks in enhancing the student's academic writing. Besides, it tries to give analyses and solutions to the common errors committed on the level of punctuation by students. It also tries to demonstrate the function and the right employment of each punctuation mark in order to produce clear and organized written works.

## **Research Questions**

This study relies on the following questions. These precise questions will be the scope of our study.

Are master one students cautious about punctuation marks when writing their assignments?

How often do teachers of written expression evaluate their students, concerning punctuations?

What would happen to the written product in cases where punctuation marks are used wrongly?

What are the punctuation marks that students usually fail in functioning appropriately in their written works?

## **Research Hypothesis**

The present study is based on one major hypothesis that shall be checked and verified. We hypothesize that if students paid attention and used punctuation marks properly, their academic writing would be better ,in terms of meaning and organization.

## **Significance of the Study**

A well written work requires well punctuation. This represents one important component of the English language structure.

The significance of this study is to discuss the role of the correct placement of punctuation marks, which is neglected by many students, in the academic field. Also, it will shed light on some common mistakes, among students, while punctuating.

## **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

We have decided to conduct this study after having vivid experience about punctuation, and its placement while writing. Many university students do not use this component appropriately in their written products, as they may misuse or neglect it in other cases.

This study intends to reach the following objectives:

- Helping student to understand the function of punctuation marks in academic writing.
- Explaining and analyzing the link exists between punctuation and academic writing.
- Discovering why some students fail to produce well punctuated works.

- Demonstrating the drawbacks of the written product when punctuation marks are put wrongly.

## **Methodology and Tools of the Study**

Our work will adopt the descriptive method due to the nature of our research topic, i. e, a qualitative study. We have decided to administer questionnaires for both teachers and students. Besides, we will try to analyze 10 of the students' written expression exam essays, to evaluate their use of punctuation marks. These research tools will usefully help us in collecting and analyzing our data.

## **Population**

We have decided to choose master one (280) students, and ten (10) teachers at the English division in the department of foreign languages at Mohamed kheider university of Biskra.

## **Sample**

To follow up this study, we have our respondents among teachers and students. A total of thirty five master one students (Department of foreign languages, division of English at Mohamed Kheider University) as a sample of students who are chosen randomly and will respond to the questionnaire anonymously. In addition, we have selected five teachers of written expression from the whole population to help us achieve this work. Finally, we have analyzed ten copies of the students' written expression exam essays, which are, also, chosen randomly.

## **Limitations of the Study**

While this study provides important insights in understanding the role of correct placement of punctuation in enhancing the students' academic writing, the limitations of the study need to be acknowledged.

In any kind of research, the aims to be realized are limited in time and population. In this case, the selected sample size of 35 students in the questionnaire, 10 of the whole essays, and 5 teachers of written expression might not be able to provide the qualitative data support for any conclusive findings, which may be a representative of the whole student population of Algeria. Although, the findings and the results obtained from the chosen sample of this study can provide some beneficial insights in enhancing student's academic writing in the Algerian EFL context.

Though, punctuation marks are very important in writing to produce efficient and comprehensible works, the sources are so limited, which represent another obstacle which will hinder us from going further in our research.

## **Structure of the Study**

To follow up this study, we have divided this research into 3 main parts. The first and the second chapters are concerned with the literature review; i.e., it introduces theoretical information about the two variables "punctuation marks" and "academic writing". Whereas, the third part is related to the field work of the study, where the questionnaires and the essays will be analyzed and interpreted for the sake of confirming our hypothesis.

The first chapter of the theoretical part deals with academic writing. It contains definitions of writing and academic writing precisely. Moreover, it illustrates the characteristics of good writing and the importance the process approach. It sheds light, also, on the two terms; coherence and cohesion, and the common objectives of academic products. Then, we have an overview about plagiarism.

The second chapter is about punctuation marks. It consists of a definition of the term punctuation and other definitions to each punctuation mark, followed by examples. Also, it explains and demonstrates the common problems of punctuation such as the misuse and the neglect of this writing aspect.

To conclude with, the last chapter is designed to confirm our hypothesis. For this reason, we have administered two questionnaires, for teachers and students. Besides, we have analyzed 10 essays of the students' written expression exam. The results of the questionnaires and the essays are analyzed and interpreted by means of descriptive statistics. Finally, we will sum up with general conclusion providing some effective suggestions and recommendations for further researches.

## **Literature Review**

The role of good punctuation in academic writing has been discussed in the field of EFL by many researchers, such as John Seely (2004); R.L.Trask (1997); R Barrass (2005); King (2004). Each one of them has affirmed the important function of punctuation in writing, and academic writing in precise. In the same context, i. e, punctuation and academic writing, several studies have been conducted before.

The first work has been conducted by I. Nemouchi in (2010) in the University of Constantine. The study aimed at testing the influence of punctuation on writing, and the



difficulties third year students encounter while using either the comma or the semicolon. The other research has been conducted by A. Arama in the same year and University, it dealt with the use of the comma and the period by second year students. A comparison was between a rote learning and classroom efficient practice to these punctuation marks. Unlike these dissertations which deal only with two components of punctuation mark, our study includes seven punctuation marks which are; the comma, full stop, semicolon, colon, question mark, exclamation mark, and the apostrophe. We have based on what have been found to fulfill our work.

Punctuation is a part of writing, so the former will not exist without the later. A good academic writing is so important, especially when we are dealing with university students. Brass (2005) affirms that in all academic subjects, students must be encouraged by their teachers and lecturers to write. The same author has linked the style of writing with the way we think i.e., whenever someone writes well, his reader would have a good assumption about that writer's thinking. He said that whenever the student thinks well his writing will be good too. (ibid).

Academic writing is supposed to be well organized, and its ideas should be built together. Hence, a correct placement of punctuation marks is needed in order to preserve meaning in writing. In this context King (2004, p.4) believes that, " Any one who reads and writes needs to possess a good working knowledge of English grammar, and that includes punctuation." The essence of punctuation is not just when it is used, but when it is used properly.

The misuse and the neglect of punctuation marks are common problems in the students' written products. Trask (1997) explains that by saying:

Yet it is quite possible that you do things that are every bit as strange and bewildering when you punctuate your writing. Perhaps you see commas in what we shall soon see are surprising places, merely because you use semicolons where you should be using colons, because you have never quite understood the difference between them.(p.2)

It is crucial to know that each punctuation mark has a function, and it is impossible to use one in the place of the other. Many students tend to use punctuation mark interchangeably just because they are not aware about the functions and rule of punctuations.

# **Chapter One: An Overview of Academic Writing**

## **Introduction**

Writing is a means of communication among human beings in a concrete manner which appears in a form of letters, words, and sentences. Writing is a productive language skill, which is not easy to be mastered. To attain a good level, the learner has to follow different stages. In his study, the student has types of writings to conduct; he writes either formally or informally. A formal use of the language is called academic writing, which has many standards that ought to be followed. This type of writing is conducted by particular kinds of people, including students at the university.

Academic writing is a crucial and complex language skill at the same time. By the former we mean that any student needs to write academically, either through writing paragraphs, essays, or even dissertations. The latter refers that academic writing has many rules and conventions that should be taken into account. To use this standardized kind of writing, one should pay attention to many language aspects concerning structure, style, and content. Thus, students are supposed to make considerable effort to improve their academic writing.

This chapter is dedicated to academic writing. Firstly, we will deal with writing, then we would shift to academic writing by giving its definition, and the process approach as a good method to have a good academic writing. Moreover, this theoretical part will include the objectives of most academic works. Furthermore, we will demonstrate the strategies used by the student in order to fulfill his/her academic work, also we will check what plagiarism is and its effect on the academic works.

## 1. Definition of Writing

Literally, writing is the concrete manifestation of the language by using symbols, signs, words to represent the intended meaning. In this respect, Rogers (2005, p.3) believes that, “We can define writing as the use of graphic marks to represent specific linguistic utterances.” writing as the use of graphic signs to produce specific linguistic utterances. Therefore, all the written forms are included. Writing is interpreting or coding the spoken form into written words. In the same context Rogers (2005, p.3) states also that “Writing involves making an utterance visible”. Regardless the forms of the message, speaking and writing are similar.

It is argued that no one can start and write a perfect written product at the first time, without refining them at least slightly.( “Writing Skills Success”, 2005). In fact, it is not an easy task to produce a perfect written work in the first time. It is sure that any student would take pen and start to write what he has in mind; however, achieving the final draft would take time and needs specific strategies. The student should be patient, since making errors while writing seems an ordinary act. “The first time you write a draft, it doesn’t matter if your writing comes out wrong or sounds stupid to you because you can change it as often as you want.” (“Writing Skills Success”, 2005, p.7). Therefore, the essence of the writing process is in the changes that the writer makes in order to elaborate his/her piece of writing.

Virtually, writing is a means of communication used by people to exchange ideas. The task of writing in English is one of the most difficult language skills. Yang (1995) states that writing in English is more difficult for anyone who learns it as a foreign language than the one who grew up speaking the language. Similar to a foreign learner, even native speaker would face problems when writing in his/her mother tongue. Unlike

the other languages' structures, English language is ambiguous. Yang (1995, p.1) adds that, "English derives from many cultures and it is constantly evolving. As a result, its grammatical rules are many and complex". English language is a mixture of many languages, thus some of its grammar and pronunciation rules are unfixed like the irregular verbs or the silent letters in this language

## **1.1 The Importance of Writing Ability**

Writing is a very important language skill, that all people of different backgrounds and educational levels should be aware, at least, about some of its rules and conventions. In this respect Harmer (2004, p.3) claims, "As societies grew larger and more industrialized, the need for citizens to be able to write and read become vital in order for bureaucratic organization to be successful." It is due to the current setting, that we are living in, any one should be able to express him/her self in a written form.

Writing and culture are interrelated. It is writing which allows us to determine, if someone is cultured or not. Rogers (2005) believes that one of the most significant cultural accomplishments of human beings is writing. It enables us to convey and record stories and information behind the immediate context. Regardless the recent invented tools, writing used to be the common means to transmit knowledge throughout history.

Engraving on walls, for instance, was one the ancient peoples' ways of recording their thoughts and knowledge. In some situations like administrations, writing is considered as a formal evidence, because of its exact data that it provides. (Rogers, 2005, p.1) adds, "The written text is also less fallible than human memory." Writing is a means to reinforce the human memory, due to that a human being would not remember every

detailed part that he dealt with before. Hence, writing is an expansion to the human memory.

All the students around the world, who have been to school, are supposed to know how to write, because writing is a part of the learning process. Cushing (2002) claims that it is an obvious reality that writing is a significant part of curriculum in all schools in the world, since the first grades onwards. By saying the word school, one would remember that writing is concerned and vice versa.

The school refers to a formal setting of education and writing is one feature of curriculum that the learner will deal with in his/her study. Besides, the majority of the materials that the student deals with will be tested in written form. Harmer (2004) believes that when we are dealing with education, student should put in mind that most exams, whether for testing the foreign language proficiencies or other skills, usually depend on the student's writing ability to measure their knowledge. If the student wants to give the right image about the knowledge he/she has in mind, he should provide enough time and attention to the written work.

## **2. Definition of Academic Writing**

Academic writing is a kind of writing which is conducted by a particular kind of people in a particular context. High level students, for example, are supposed to conduct this type of writing. Wilkinson and Hommes (2010) believe that academic writing includes the large range of particular writing tasks that you should conduct during the course of your academic studies like papers, reports, literature reviews, projects, case studies, dissertations, theses, research papers, and articles.

Writing academically is not a simple task, especially for foreign writers, because of its complicated writing system. Baily (2003, p.1) says, in the same context, that “International students especially find the written demands of their courses extremely challenging.” Language structure is an important side in academic works, which involves grammar, spelling, and punctuation. When taking that element, structure, into consideration while writing, we would ensure that the student has respected one of the standards of the formal writing.

All the academic tasks share a common reader, who is almost an educated person. Wilkinson and Hommes (2010) say about the writing tasks that all what they have in common is the reader, who is an educated person and, usually, he is a professional in that domain, such as a teacher in the school. Most of the students’ written product in the academic setting would be tested and corrected by an expert person who is the teacher. The professor is the common reader of the academic written tasks and it is his job to look after the student’s written works and determines the level of its formality and correctness.

In academic writing, it is pivotal to the student to have a prior knowledge about what he/she is going to write, because by his/her writing one would treat certain phenomenon which should be well explained and proved. Leki (1998) sees that even in the first part of your written product, it is important to have an idea about what you are going to write, how to clarify it, and how to seem convincing to the reader. The student should have a plan about every detailed part that it will be dealt with. It is important, too, for the student to select the appropriate material which would supply a clear idea on the receiver’s perception.



## **2.1 The Writing Process**

Writing is a process, since it has other steps involved in the writing activity. Bulter (2007, p.23) says, “A process is a series of actions. You take these steps because you want to reach a goal.” Good writing does not come easily; instead, many activities should be conducted. Before start writing, any student should have an objective, which would simplify the process, and the steps would be well organized.

The stages of writing are the core of the writing process. It is viewed by Wilkinson and Hommes (2010) that a number of stages should be followed in order to produce an academic work. Regardless the different names to writing stages by researchers most of them agree that there are three main stages of writing process, namely Brown and Hood (1989). The first stage is the planning one, followed by the drafting stage, and the last one is the revising stage. The writing stages would make the process of writing easy by dividing it into many sections; each one has its own characteristics. As the process of writing is divided into three stages, the latter will be divided, too, into processes within each stage. Wilkinson and Hommes (2010) states under the planning stage other three stages which are: the thinking stage, the research stage, and the outline stage.

### **2.1.1 The Planning Stage**

Planning the paper is the first thing that should be done in order to have a good beginning. Wilkinson and Hommes (2010) affirm that going successfully through the planning process is very important in order to have a good start in your paper. This strategy is the key to arrange ideas in mind and remove ambiguity. In the planning process, the student has many things to do. None, approximately, would accomplish a writing task

without making efforts. Brown and Hood (1989) see that ,“Most writing requires some preparation.”

In the planning stage, the student should look for suitable ideas for his/her topic. (Butler, 2007, p45) says that, “In this step you begin to get ideas for the paragraph.” The student should conduct a way to bring thought and information to his paper. Strategies such as brainstorming and freewriting are required in this case. Freewriting and brainstorming are the common ways emphasized by most researchers to generate ideas about the topic.

According to (Leki, 1998, p.21) that, “Freewriting is starting to record on paper every thing comes to your mind about the topic.” Brown and Hood (1989) define brainstorming as storming or operating one’s mind looking for ideas. The two terminologies, freewriting and brainstorming, are two names provided, nearly, to the same action, which is generating knowledge about the topic.

In the planning stage, there is another process that should be conducted to fulfill the planning task; it is called the outlining process. Wilkinson and Hommes (2010) state that planning an outline has a goal which is to help the writer to arrange thoughts, and present them in a logical order. Outlining is the way to organize and put the gathered ideas accordingly with the intended topic. This process is supposed to be the last step in the planning stage. Leki (1998,p.30) sees that, “Outlining can be a transition between inventing and writing a first draft”.

However, outlining is something specific or it is a part of planning, they might be seen the same. In this context, Leki (1995) argues that the outline is not a plan; instead, its function is to control all the aspects that student wants to deal with in the topic and maintaining that aspects in a logical order. Not like planning, which is general, outlining is

a matter of adjustment to the ideas that have been generated before, such as putting similar ideas together, or adding and omitting if it is required.

### **2.1.2 The Drafting Stage**

After having an organized plan about the topic, it is time for the student to start writing. This stage is called the drafting stage. According to Brown and Hood (1989) the drafting stage is when one really starts to write. The only thing is required in this stage is putting words on paper. In this stage the goal of the student is just getting ideas down to the paper. While writing the first draft, it is important to use the plan. (“Academic Writing”, 2013).

In this stage the main point is to write without looking to any other aspect, including language structure. Leki (1998) says that it does not matter if grammar, spelling, punctuation, or vocabulary are correct or not, the important thing is getting your ideas down on paper. The important thing in this step is to generate ideas, which is the main purpose of this stage. Since any stage has its own function; it is a mistake to try to produce correct grammar, checking spelling, caring about punctuation, or choosing the appropriate vocabulary. It is better to postpone this to the next stage which is the revising one, since it could be the appropriate time.

Drafting is to write or to try to jot down any idea which has relation to the topic. A strategy is used after finishing one’s writing, “Leave it for 24 hours than come back to it.” (“Academic Writing” 2013, p.12). Even the writer can evaluate himself and he may discover then that some simple mistakes have been made. It is something tough to produce a perfect written work without any later adjustment. Hence, it is considered as something common to leave your first trial and return back to it later to revise it.

### 2.1.3 The Revising Stage

The revising stage is considered as the last stage in the process of writing. It is the occasion for the student to get rid of any mysterious point in the writing process. Also, the writer would evaluate and check his/her work by looking for the weak points in order to refine them. Brown and Hood (1989) see that the role of revising is to check two main things; the first is that what you wanted to say has been said, and the second is that you have conveyed it in an appropriate and a clear manner. One feature of academic writing is its intended purpose that the student, by his/her work, wants to achieve. The first thing is that he should check that he/she is in the right path. Another thing should be checked which is the readability and the clarity of the written product.

The revising task is not difficult with regard to the other tasks within the writing process. Revising is something ordinary; hence, it would not influence on the writer's performance. Leki (1998, p.140) claims that, "Revising is not punishment for writing a bad text. All experienced writers revise." Whoever is the writer, he should pass through the revising task and he should know how to deal with this writing stage as a part of his writing process.

Revising the paper is an important task that the writer should conduct; however, it is the easiest stage. Brown and Hood view (1989) that this stage is the most significant step in the writing process. In the revising stage the writer would adds, changes, or even omit unnecessary expressions or words, instead of focusing just on checking and correcting spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

looking for errors in the written work in order to correct or change is called editing, for example the level of grammar and spelling. Butler (2007, p.45) says about editing that,

“You can make changes to the content of your paragraph.” The student in this stage can make even changes concerning the content. According to (Brown & Hood, 1989), many things that the student should look for when revising:

- Said the same thing in a different way.
- Made longer sentences into two or three shorter ones.
- Changed punctuation.
- Changed the order of parts to make the content or purpose clearer.

### **3. Organization in Academic Writing**

In academic writing, a great part of the student’s intention is provided to the text organization. This kind of written product, academic writing, is supposed to be well organized, and its ideas should be built together in order to form one interrelated body. Harmer (2004, p.22) states that, “For writing to be truly accessible, however, it also needs to be both cohesive and coherent.” The reader will not understand the written work unless the text has coherence and cohesion.

#### **3.1 Cohesion**

Baily (2003) states that, “Cohesion means linking phrases together so that the whole text is clear and readable.” Cohesion is from the word to cohere. The student should know how to relate his written work by certain cohesive devices. Harmer (2004) views that when writing a text there are certain linguistic techniques in our hands to make sure that our written product is interrelated and sticks together.

Cohesion is about the linguistic components and how they serve each other, where words would refer to the other by using some strategies. The repetition of the same word

for example is not a drawback. Sometimes, in contrast, it is a positive act done by the writer. He emphasizes always on certain words to make the reader understand the meaning.

According to Harmer (2004, p.22) “We can use various grammatical devices to help the reader understand what is being referred to all times, even when words are left out or pronouns are substituted for nouns.” The writer tries to change the routine of repeating the same nouns by compensating them by personal pronouns. According to the same researcher, the writer may support the work by the inclusion of some related words, for example: water, waves, sea, tide. (ibid, 2004, p.29)

### **3.1.1 Lexical and Grammatical Cohesion**

In writing, we have two types of cohesion: lexical and grammatical one. The first type of cohesion is related to the vocabulary and terminologies that are used in the written work. According to harmer that lexical cohesion has two characteristics: repetition of word and lexical set chains (ibid). The former refers to some words in the content that are repeated throughout the text. The latter is that the text is interrelated by using words belonging to the same family, for instance: grandparents, daughter, sons, and grandchildren.

The second type of cohesion refers to all the grammatical aspects that the student can use in his/her written language to maintain cohesion. According to Harmer (ibid), grammatical cohesion is achieved in a number of different ways, such as, pronoun and possessive references, article references, tense agreement, linkers, or substitution and ellipsis

### 3.2 Coherence

Coherence is one of the most important elements of academic writing. Since we would not have beneficial and successful academic writing without coherence. Marray and Hughes (2008, p.45) argue that, “ In academic writing coherence is particularly important, where failure or success may well depend on how clearly your ideas and lines of arguments have been managed to communicate to your reader.” It is something common that good ideas or topics fail in achieving their objectives due to that they are not coherent. Although, a very simple works may have a big impact just because they are coherent.

Coherence in written works is maintained when there is a logical order and harmony between ideas. In the same context, Harmer (2004) views that in order to have a coherent text, some kinds of internal logic should be exist which would make it easy for the reader to follow without the use of cohesive devices. Cohesive devices do not, always, ensure that the text is coherent; however, coherence may be present without cohesion. In short, the former in something rigid without the latter.

Coherence depends on the student’s knowledge about the language and the subject he is going to write about. whenever the student is competent, he/she would be able to recognize one’s drawbacks toward coherence. Creme and Lea (2008, p.167) believe that, “Your own intuitive knowledge of grammar and the way in which sentences work and are structured will help you realize when things are not making sense.” It is the mission of the student to control coherence in the written work, by using the right methodology which fits the subject.

It is not enough to convey a meaning just by words or expressions in isolation. Instead, the student should know how to arrange his/her thoughts to make them comprehensible. Marray and Hughes (2008) see that how insightful or original those ideas

may be does not matter, if you are unable to present them clearly and logically, they would have no meaning and value. It is worth to know that any word or idea would have a big impact if it is put in its appropriate place.

Coherence is when the written work is clear and well understood by the reader. The student should present the work step by step and has sequences of information. Marry and Hughes (2008, p.45) state that, “Just as the story has a kind of history, a piece of academic writing has a history in the sequence of ideas that builds up its argument structure.” As when reading a history, the reader can deduce the intentions of the writer or the lesson wanted to be provided, in academic writing the writer’s intention and the way ideas are presented should be clear to be deduced by the reader. Harmer (2004) sees that in academic writing, the reader would understand two things: the writer’s purpose and the writer’s line of thought. The former is the writer’s intention; does he want to inform, suggest, make judgment, or express opinion? The latter, is the writer has a logical order, which is deduced by following the steps?

#### **4. Characteristics of a Good Writing**

It is pivotal for any student to check and examine his/her written product before it is submitted to the readers or the examiners. This kind of activity can be conducted as a part of revision. Yet, clarity and brevity are two criteria of a good writing that should be taken into account while adjusting the written product. Thus, respecting the standards of those terms would ensure two things about the reader: understanding and appreciating the work.

##### **4.1 Clarity**

Clarity in writing is the means which enables the writer to control the reader, because whenever the writer uses simple words, his intention will be clearly conveyed.



Barras (2005) argues that in most academic writing, you ought be attempting to convey your meaning as simply and clearly as you can. As an academic writer, the student should avoid any kind of ambiguity by using difficult and complex words. Instead, the student should use a plain language to enable the reader to reach the intended meaning. (Barras, *ibid*, p.51) adds, “If we use words incorrectly, or choose words our readers do not understand, we shall be misunderstood.” It is important for any academic writer to expect any problem or trouble that the reader would face because by his/her writing, the student wants either to convince or inform, and unexpected problem in understanding will hinder the comprehension process

In academic writing, the vocabulary are chosen should be in accordance with the context. It may be true that any word has its synonyms; however, there is no word carries the exact meaning of the other. According to Barras (*ibid*, p51) “No two words are identical in meaning, and the choice of one word where another would make more sense does not help readers.” The student should master, or at least aware about, the term that he/she uses, especially when paraphrasing others expressions, because we can find word that have more than one meaning. Barras (*ibid*) believes that people tend to select fashionable terms while writing. In academic writing, it is important to use the appropriate word because the overuse of the same word would devaluate it.

## **4.2 Brevity**

It is common that while thinking or even begin with the initial stages of writing, the student may have ideas and structures about what he/she is going to discuss. However, when the student starts the revising task many thoughts seem to be repeated, boring, or even irrelevant to the subject. Barras (2005) advices the student to use one word instead of a phrase if the one word conveys the meaning perfectly. It is also required for the student

to get rid of any useless expression in his/her writing, and tries to reduce, as much as possible, the lengthy expressions.

## **5. Main Objectives of Academic Writing**

Writing is a medium used for communication and exchanging ideas and opinions that contain certain messages. Any academic writing has a specific purpose either an obvious or a hidden one, which should be deduced by the reader. Baily (2003) views that the writer's intentions need to be found by the reader, is the writer wants to persuade, describe, inform, or to entertain? Therefore, by writing, the student would narrate, convince the audience, expose a phenomenon or write for pleasure. The purpose would influence or determine the kind of language that is going to be used.

In academic writing, objectives are determined and limited by the content of the kind of writing or by the name itself, which is an academic writing. Therefore, the used language is a formal one. In academic writing, the student uses a formal language, either to describe a phenomenon or to convince the reader about it. Wilkinson and Hommes (2010, p.5) believe that, "Academic papers (and most other forms of academic writing) are typically expository or argumentative". Therefore, there is no place for narrating or entertaining in academic production.

### **5.1 Persuasive Writing**

The objective of the academic work in this situation is to prove the writer's opinion, and convince the reader about it. The writer should give credible argument about the side he wants to support. Wilkinson and Hommes (2010) argue that a persuasive or argumentative paper must choose a side, make a case for it, refute and consider alternative

arguments, and convince the undecided reader that the idea that is presented is the appropriate or the best one. It is like a comparison in term of usefulness and superiority, where the writer would try to support his/her opinion by concrete arguments. It is mentioned that dismissing the other sides completely would weaken your own argument (ibid). It is better, for the writer, to show the advantages of the other side than demonstrating its drawbacks.

## **5.2 Expository Writing**

According to Wilkinson and Hommes (2010, p.5) “An expository or informative paper describes or explains a particular set of phenomena, and provides an account of why these phenomena are found in one or more specific situations or contexts.” The writer in the expository paper is going to describe a case, and try to give his/her contribution by explanation to that situation from many angles. On the one hand, he would supply the reader by the cause which leads to the creation of that phenomenon, regardless if it has bad or good feedback. On the other hand, the writer would give, then, solutions or suggestions that prevent the occurrence of the phenomenon. According to Wilkinson and Hommes (ibid), the expository paper is different from the persuasive one, in terms of methodology and the way data are provided. However, both of them are aiming at acquainting the reader with a body of knowledge.

## **6. Level of Formality in Academic Writing**

Formal writing is a type of language that is used in academic works, where the used language is the Standard English. According to Marray and Hughes (2008) what distinguishes academic writing from the other types of written works is its level of formality. It is distinguished from the other styles by many characteristics such as: the

vocabulary is used, the role of the writer in this style is determined, and the words structure is another point which should be taken into consideration in the formal style.

## **6.1 Word Structure**

Writing the whole word is one feature of a formal and an academic writing. Due to that, clarity is one of the most important keys to make the reader understands any work. Using abbreviations and contractions would save time and space, however, they are unaccepted in academic writing. The writer should use the term that he expects the reader would understand.

## **6.2 Vocabulary**

It is the type of words and terminologies that are used in writing, that would determine the writer's style. As in the spoken form, the person would deduce the level of literacy or the status of his/her interviewer by the vocabulary that is used. In the written form, the presence of certain terms in your written production would allow your audience to recognize that you are using the formal style. Marray and Hughes (2008) argue that it is important to avoid complexity which is unnecessary, in written products. the conventions of the formal style that push the writer to select the terminologies.

In the academic works, there are certain words that should be used by the academic writers, as it is suggested by Marray and Hughes, (2008, p.94) in the following table:

<b>Non academic</b>	<b>Academic</b>
Shows	Illustrates
Saw/noticed	Observed
So	Therefore/consequently
But	However/ nevertheless
People	Subjects
Big	Large, considerable
Long	Extensive, extended
Seems	Appears
Important	Significant

**Table 1.1:Academic terms**

### **6.3 Objectivity**

In the academic works, objectivity is one of the most important features that should be taken into consideration. In formal style, the writer should be neutral when dealing and presenting the academic work, in order to give more credibility and significance to the written product. Objectivity requires from the writer to avoid certain things, such as using the first personal pronouns, emotional language, and imperative forms.

The writer would not include him/her self because of some constrains, mainly the purpose, the content and the audience. It is important to know that the use of personal pronouns would reduce would reduce the reliability and significance of the written work, thus, it is better to rephrase all the subjective sequences. Instead, Wilkinson and Hommes (2010) suggest that the writer should use the passive form or change words by others that fit the situation.

The kind of language used in academic writing is another factor that needs to be careful about. The adjectives used in academic writing should be scientific and should depend on logic. Wilkinson and Hommes (2010) stress that the writer should avoid

emotional language, for instance “the plan is stupid”. It seems that the writer is presenting his/her opinion when using emotional adjectives, and providing personal opinion is one drawback in the writer’s writing performance.

The use of the imperative form is also not allowed in academic level ,since it is a kind of subjectivity too. According to Wilkinson Hommes (2010) the writer’s mission is not to teach the reader, hence, it is better to avoid imperative forms like “recall that”, “remember”, “consider”.

## **7. Reliability of a Material**

Reliability is an important thing, which the student should take into consideration when selecting the appropriate material to involve it in his/her academic project. Creme and Lea (2008) suggest some questions that should be in mind before involving a material in an academic work like, does this person seems to be reliable authority? What organization do they belong? What have they published? It is the answer of the questions that would make you decide whether use the material or not.

## **9.Plagiarism in Academic Writing**

Plagiarism is a term that should be known by the academic writer, because it is related to citing sources, which is part of the academic work. In the act of using others works, the student may fall into plagiarism. A simple definition suggested by Pecorari (2008) says that plagiarism is using others material as one’s own. It is when the student speaks about a work has been taken and identifying it as one’s own product. Some students think that plagiarizing is just a simple mistake or negative use of a material; however, this act is considered as a crime by some researchers. Leki (1995) affirms that in some situations; plagiarism is a crime.

It is not legal to take another's work without recognizing the author. Researchers give an equivalent term to the act of plagiarizing which is "stealing". Plagiarism is the inability to cite source appropriately. Pecorari (2008) claims that it is pivotal for an academic writer to be able to write from sources. An important factor that leads to the lack of this skill, citing sources, is the rigid instructions done by the teacher. (Pecorari, 2008) believes that instead of warning, teaching should be about the skills needed to avoid plagiarism.

Giving credit is very important in the English writing Leki (1995) defined the act as, acknowledging the owner of that words or ideas; besides saying where and when they were written. Unlike the English language, plagiarism might be seen less dangerous in other languages. Pecorari (2008, p.12) states that, "A view among many teachers who work with international students is that such students like those especially likely to plagiarize." For that reason, student's origin should be taken in to consideration when teaching. According to Pecorari (2008, p.13) that students from other cultures may have the following perception:

- Students from a 'collectivist' culture may not perceive a need to give credit to individual authors.
- Students perceptions about their roles, e, g. a belief that their roles as writers is to repeat information from sources, may make them feel that citations are superfluous.
- It has even been asserted that in some cultures plagiarism is not relevant concept, or not conceived of in the same way as it is in the West.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter is dedicated to academic writing, and it has been divided into three part. Firstly, it includes a definition of writing in specific and its importance. Secondly, it involves a definition of academic writing and the writing process as a means to ensure a good academic writing. Moreover, it demonstrates that organization, objectives, and vocabulary are used are points, which would identify the type of writing is used. Thirdly, we have an overview about plagiarism and what it represents in academic writing. Therefore, academic writing is clearly illustrated in this chapter, and it would help us in shifting to deal with the next section which is about punctuation marks.



## **Chapter Two: The Importance of Punctuation Marks**

## **Introduction**

Punctuation is an important aspect of the written language, because of the influential role that it plays in written products. As in driving, the driver should find signs that would show where to stop, or where to change the speed; in writing the reader should be provided by signals to facilitate the reading process. It is the function of punctuation to help the readers understand the exact meaning of any written work. Punctuation is used in writing to separate words, phrases, and sentences. Its function is to simplify the transmission of ideas and to make it more easier.

The current chapter is about punctuation marks. First, we will have a definition of punctuation, and we will discuss the frequent mistakes that students commit while punctuating, such as the misuse or the neglect of punctuation in a written work. Second, we will have an overview about the most problematic punctuation marks; the full stop, comma, colon, semicolon, question mark, exclamation mark, and the apostrophe. We will define each one, and explain its right function. Third, a conclusion will be provided to the chapter.

### **1. Definition of Punctuations**

Punctuation, as a term, is derived from the Latin word “punctum”; and it is the use of signals, that do not belong to the alphabet, to show meaning and intonation that could not be conveyed by the written letters (King, 2004). Punctuation is seen as an indispensable part of the written language. Trask (1997, p.1) states that, “Punctuation is one aspect of the written English.” The student should know that punctuation marks are not extra

symbols in the written work; in contrast, they should be present as a guide to clarify the written message.

It is worth to know that punctuation is seen to be more important than spelling in the written language. King (2004) views that spelling is less important than punctuation. It is true that when there is an error in spelling, the meaning would stay close to the intended one; however, a mistake in punctuation would change the whole meaning. As he said, “If you are getting your commas, semicolons and full stops wrong, it means that you are not getting your thoughts right, and your mind is muddled.” (ibid, p.1).

It is important to be aware about the real function and nature of punctuations in writing. According to Barrass (2005), punctuation marks in writing indicate pauses made in speech to make it clear. In speaking, the person is able to use many strategies to show the intention, such as intonation and non verbal language. For that, punctuation is used to fill the gaps exist in the written language, because punctuation is a key that enables the reader to deduce the meaning. King reinforces the idea that punctuation is the essence of writing by saying, “It is the nuts and bolts of the language.” (2004, p.1).

## **2. Problems of Punctuation**

### **2.1 Misusing the Punctuation**

Misusing punctuation marks is a common problem that many students face while writing. It, frequently, happens when the student uses a punctuation mark interchangeably with another mark, or when he is unable to use the right punctuation mark in the right place. Foster (2008) believes that properly placed and correct punctuation provides style, and makes news in any story powerful in meaning. If punctuation is misused, it can spoil the message. As result, it may have positive or

negative role. The important point that should be stressed is that any punctuation mark has its own function and rule that should be followed. Trask (1997, p.3) says that, “If your reader has to wade through your strange punctuation, she will have many trouble following your meaning.”

Wrong punctuation may mislead the reader and create a kind of misunderstanding between the addresser and the addressee. We will consider and explain how the meaning would change in each of the following examples, suggested by Trask (1997), misplace of punctuation mark:

- We had one problem: only Janet knew we faced bankruptcy. Explaining the problem.
- We had one problem only: Janet knew we faced bankruptcy. Illustrating the number of problems.
- We had one problem only, Janet knew: we faced bankruptcy. Emphasizing on the person.
- We had one problem only Janet knew we faced: bankruptcy. Describing the type of problem.

## **2.2 Neglecting the Punctuation**

Neglecting to punctuate is a widespread drawback among students, and especially foreign learners. However, punctuation is a part of the writing process, which helps in conveying the proper meaning. Barras (2005) believes that Without pauses when speaking or punctuation in writing, the meaning of sentence is not clear. The words and expressions in written product would be rigid without punctuation; due to that, a sequence with the same terms would express more than one meaning, regardless its punctuation. Hence, the

writer should put the reader in mind when writing, in order to be well understood. The following example is suggested by Trask (1997), which illustrates the limitation of an expression without punctuation marks:

Example:

- We had one problem only Janet knew we faced bankruptcy.

This problem of the neglect of punctuation does not include only students or beginners, however, one would find even people with high grade in the field who underestimate this component of the written language. In the same context, Trask (1997) argues that many people without ever learning the difference between a colon and semicolon, have made successful careers. It is unreasonable to be competent writer without being able to manage punctuation in a written product. For that, in order to have a good ability to write, one should consider punctuation as an aid.

### **3. The Importance of Punctuation**

Punctuation is very important in any piece of writing. It leads us to say that this part of writing mechanics needs not just to be visible when writing, however, it needs to be in its right place. Harmer (2004) stresses that a correct punctuation is an important skill. The student should know that people may judge if a writer is qualified or not from the way of punctuating his writing. Hence, a correct punctuation means a competent writer and vice versa. In the same context, King (2004, p.4) argues that, “Any one who reads and writes needs to possess a good working knowledge of English grammar, and that includes punctuation.” Thus, whenever we are dealing with writing, we have to mention punctuation as a part of the writing competence requirements.

A correct placement of punctuation has a positive result on the reader's understanding. Brown and Lea (2003, p.34) explain that the usefulness of punctuation can be summarized in the following:

- Punctuation helps your reader understand what you mean.
- Punctuation helps you keep track of what you have written and what you are going to write.
- Some punctuation is simply convention. We do it now because it has always been done that way(e. g. capital letters, apostrophes).
- Revising is the right time to look closely at your punctuation.
- Looking at the punctuation used by other writers will help you more than learning rules.

Finally, a correct punctuation would make a written work clear and comprehensible. Nevertheless, placing it incorrectly would create some troubles toward the language meaning. Crème and lea (2008) say that punctuation actually makes connection so that the writing begins to take on an overall structure. Due to that, it is not just working on dividing the written production into sanctions, but it is a tool to link between the different parts of the text.

## **4. Punctuation Marks**

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

The comma is a device used by the writer to separate the sentence into readable chunks. This punctuation mark is mostly used by the students, but it is, often, difficult for them to properly place it in the. Trask (1997, p.13) states that, "Comma... is very frequently used

and frequently used wrongly.” The comma is used to create pauses in the sentence shorter than the one created in the end of the sentence.

Students usually feel anxious when using the comma, because of the different rules and uses that it has. (Crème & Lea, 2008). For that, it is better for the students who begin to write for a new subject to use short sentences. This would make the use of commas more effective.

The student should be aware of the different uses of comma, which is the most complex punctuation mark. Trask (1997) states four uses of the comma, which are the following: the listing comma, the joining comma, the gapping comma and the bracketing comma. Each type has its own conventions that distinguishes it from the others.

#### **4.1.1 The Listing Comma**

This type of comma is used as a substitution for the word “and”, and sometimes for the word “or”. It is used in a list where many words, phrases, or even complete sentences are joined. The following examples (Trask, 1997,p.14) that illustrate the use of the listing comma.

Examples:

- The three Musketeers were Athos, Porthos and Aramis.
- Hungarian is spoken in Hungary, in western Romania, in northern Serbia and in parts of Austria and Slovakia.
- You can fly to Bombay via Moscow, via Athens or via Cairo.
- Lisa speaks French, Juliet speaks Italian, and I speak Spanish.

It is noticed that if we replace the commas in this case by the word “and” or “or”, the result would be clumsy.

- The three Musketeers were Athos **and** Porthos **and** Aramis.
- Hungarian is spoken in Hungary **and** in western Romania **and** in northern Serbia **and** in parts of Austria **and** Slovakia.
- You can fly to Bombay via Moscow **or** via Athens **or** via Cairo.
- Lisa speaks French **and** Juliet speaks Italian **and** I speak Spanish.

#### 4.1.2 The Joining Comma

The joining comma is slightly different from the listing one. This kind of comma is used to join two complete sentences into one; however, the comma, in this case, must be followed by a suitable connecting word. The connecting words that can be used are; and, or, but, while, and yet. There are some examples which show the use of joining comma:

- You must hand in your essay by Friday, **or** you will receive the mark of zero.
- Britain has long been isolated in Europe, **but** now it is beginning to find allies.
- Billions of dollars have been hurled into the star wars projects, **yet** we appear to have nothing to show for this colossal expenditure.
- A dropped goal counts three points in rugby union, **while** in rugby league it only counts one point.

The students should be aware that, it is impossible to join two complete sentence by a comma, without adding a connecting word. According to Trask (1997) one of the commonest error that students commit is when they forget to use a connecting word after the comma. The following examples illustrate some of the wrong uses of the joining comma by Trask (1997,p.18).



- Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest countries, its annual income is only 80 dollars per person.
- the Britain are notoriously bad at learning foreign languages, the Dutch are famously good at it.
- Borg won his fifth straight Wimbledon title in 1980, the following year he lost in final.

### **4.1.3 The Gapping Comma**

Another kind of comma is the gapping one, and it is very easy. It is used to show that one or more words are omitted, when the missing words would repeat words already used in the same sentence.

For example: some Norwegians wanted to base their national language on the speech of the capital city; others, on the speech of the rural countryside.

In the previous example, the gapping comma shows that the words, wanted to base their national language, have been omitted. The sentence is equivalent the other one which might be :

Example:

Some Norwegians wanted to base their national language on the speech of the capital city; others wanted to be it on the speech of the rural countryside.

### **4.1.4 The Bracketing Commas**

This type of comma is totally different from the other three types, and it has its own function too. The bracketing commas are used, frequently, wrongly by the students and

they have problems when dealing with this type. The rule of the bracketing commas is: a pair of commas used to mark a weak interruption of the sentence; however, the interruption does not effect on the smooth flow of the sentence.

We have to note that bracketing commas are happening, always, in pairs (Trask, 1997). The following examples are about the bracketing commas.

Examples:

- These findings, we would suggest, cast doubt upon his hypothesis.
- Schliemann, of course, did his digging before modern archaeology was invented.
- Darwin's origin of species, published in 1859, revolutionized biological thinking.
- The Pakistanis, like the Australians before them, have exposed the short comings of the England batting order.
- Rupert Brooke, who was killed in the war at the age of twenty eight, was one of our finest poets.

We should observe that even when we remove the bracketing commas, the sentence would make sense and stay clear.

- These findings cast doubt upon his hypothesis.
- Schliemann did his digging before modern archaeology was invented.
- Darwin's origin of species revolutionized biological thinking.
- The Pakistanis have exposed the shortcomings of the England batting order.
- Rupert Brooke was one of our finest poets.

## 4.2 The Full Stop (.)

The full stop (.), which is named the period in the USA, and is used to mark the end of statement. According to Kirkman (2006), the full stop, or the full point, has a principal use, that is to sign the end of declarative sentence. Also, he adds that this mark can indicate an abbreviation. In writing, when the student feels that he/she is going to embark on another idea, it is the suitable time to put a full stop.

According to King (2000) the period has two functions:

- It ends a sentence.
- It indicates abbreviations.

### 4.2.1 Ending a Sentence

Examples:

- The mask temperature fluctuates throughout the experiment. (declarative)
- Align the three holes in steering- assembly shaft with three holes in the handle- assembly color. (imperative)

It does not matter if the sentence is lengthy or short, because the full stop would have a place, only, when the thought is complete. Here, we have an example which contains few full stops; however, it conveys the needed meaning:

The opening of the Ken Loach's film Riff-Raff in new York casts doubt on Winston Churchill's observation that the united states and Britain were two countries separated by a common language. In what must be a first, an entire British film has been given sub-titles to help Americans cut through the thick stew of Glaswegian, Geordie, Liverpudlian, West Indian accents. With the arrival of Riff-Raff, English as spoken by many British citizens

has qualified as a foreign language in the US. Admittedly, the accents on the screen would present a challenge to many people raised on the Queen's English. But it is disconcerting to watch a British film with subtitles, not unlike watching Marlon Brando dubbed into Italian, (Trask, 1997, p.6).

#### **4.2.2 Marking an Abbreviation**

Trask (1997) believes that, sometimes, full stops are used in punctuating abbreviations.

Examples:

- The note said that to call Dr. Nayel Mon. or Wed. in evening.

Whenever an abbreviation is in the end of a sentence, one should only put a period.

- This year thanksgiving falls on Nov. 23.
- Mrs. Smith told Jimmy to be ready at 8 P. M.

#### **4.3 Colon (:)**

The colon (:) is used to show that the material is to follow. According to Kirkman (2006), the material that follows might be a summary, a list, a complete sentence, a question, or a quotation. The colon is usually followed by an explanation to what have been said; in other words, using a colon means that the writer is going from general to specific. Throughout these examples, Trask(1997,p3.9) illustrates the different uses that a colon may have.

- I propose the creation of a new post: school executive officer.

This colon is used before an explanation or a summary that identifies the post in question.

- Africa is facing a terrifying problem: perpetual drought.

The sentence that follows the colon explains what the problem is.

- The situation is clear: if you have unprotected sex with a stranger, you risk AIDS.

The sentence that follows the colon explains what the clear situation is.

- She was sure of one thing: she was not going to be a house wife.

The sentence that follows the colon identifies the one thing she was sure of it.

- Several friends have provided me with inspiration: Tim, Ian, above all, Larry.

The sentence that follows the colon identifies the friends in question.

Example:

The researchers concluded: “Most patients with non Q wave myocardial infarction do not benefit from routine early invasive management consisting of coronary angiography revascularization.” (Kirkman, 2006, p32).

The colon, in this example, is preceding a direct quotation.

There are some mistakes which are committed by the student while using a colon, and these mistakes would effect the students’ writing performance. Hence, we should be aware of the kinds of errors toward the colon use, and they are mainly the following:

- The colon could not be used at the end of a heading which introduces a new thing.
- The colon never preceded by a white space ( while typing).
- The colon never followed by a hyphen or a dash.

## 4.4 The Semicolon (; )

Kirkman (2006, p.91) advises, “Use semi-colon to link statements that are grammatically independent but these are too closely related in meaning to be separated by a full stop.” For that, whenever a semi-colon is found, we should deduce that it is preceded by complete sentence, and followed by a complete one too.

Using the semi-colon seems to irritate many people while writing; i. e, the incorrect use of this mark. It intermediates between the period and the comma, and it means that, on the one hand, the break serves by the comma is weaker than the one serves by the semi-colon. On the other hand, the semi-colon serves a kind break than a period.

### 4.4.1 Conditions of Using a Semicolon

It is assumed that the real function of a semi-colon is to join two complete sentences into one sentence. However, to fulfill its function, the semi-colon needs some conditions, (Trask, 1997,p.41):

- The two sentences are sentence are felt to be too closely related to be separated by a full stop.
- There is no connecting word which would require a comma, such as and or but.
- The special conditions requiring a colon are absent.

A semicolon can be replaced by a full stop, or by the word and preceded by a joining comma. Here we have examples to illustrate some functions of a semicolon:

#### 4.4.1.1 Coordinating Related Statements to a Sentence

Examples:

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

The last example could be as follow:

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.

It was the best of times, and it was the worst of times.

#### **4.4.1.2 Separating a List of Items**

Example:

The responsible manager handles: administration of the basic package; delivering of dumps; transfer of test results; dissemination information

### **4.5 The Apostrophe (')**

The apostrophe has two major functions, which are: ownership and to form contraction. Eight rules are mainly stated by researchers to explain all cases where apostrophes may appear( Starkey, 2004, p.49), and there are the following:

The first rule: add 's to form the singular possessive, even when the noun ends with s.

Examples:

- The school 's lunchroom is not cleaned.
- Mr. Perkins 's argumentative essay was very convincing.

The second rule says: a few plurals not ending in s also form the possessive by adding 's.

Examples:

- The children 's toys were found in all rooms of the house.
- The line for women 's restroom was very long.
- Men 's shirts come in variety of neck size.

The third rule is: Possessive plural nouns already ending with **s** need only the apostrophe added.

Examples:

- The customers' access codes are confidential.
- The students' grades improved each semester.

The fourth rule includes: indefinite pronouns show ownership by the addition of **'s**.

Examples:

- Everyone 's hearts were in the right place.
- Somebody 's dog was barking all night.

The fifth rule says: possessive pronouns do not have apostrophes, even though some of them may end with **s**.

Examples:

- Our car is up for sale
- His handwriting is difficult to read.

The sixth rule is: use an **'s** to form plurals of letters, figures, and numbers used as words, like certain expressions of time and money. The expressions of money and time do not indicate ownership in usual sense.

Examples:

- My street address contains three 5 's.
- The project was the result of a year 's worth of work.



The seventh rule says: showing possession in last word when using names of organizations and businesses, and in joint ownership.

Examples:

- Sam and Janet 's graduation was three months ago.
- The future farmers of America 's meeting was moved to Monday.

The eighth rule is: apostrophes form contractions by taking the place of the missing letter or number. Usually a contraction is avoided in highly formal writing.

- Poor form: We 're going out of town next week.
- Good form: We are going out of town next week.

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

The question mark (?) is usually used at the end of a sentence to sign a direct question. According to Kirkman (2006), question mark used in three cases; indicating the end of a direct question, expressing doubt, and expressing a polite request.

##### **4.6.1 Indicating a Direct Question**

This use of the question mark, indicating a direct question, is the famous and easy one, and it is commonly used by the student. Here are some examples including this type:

- What is the capital of Algeria?
- Do you have a pen I can borrow?
- Who said that?
- Are you angry?

We have to notice that in a question of a direct quotation where the question is direct, the question mark is used. Unlike the direct question, in the indirect question the mark should not be used; instead, a full stop is required. We have some examples about the use of the question mark in both cases, direct and indirect quotation:

#### **4.6.1.1 Direct Quotation**

Examples:

- He inquired “What is the capital of Algeria?”
- Her mother asked “Are you hungry?”

#### **4.6.1.2 Indirect Quotation**

Examples:

- He inquired about the capital of Algeria.
- Her mother wants to know if she is hungry.

#### **4.6.2 Expressing Doubt**

The question mark could be used to express the uncertain expressions or doubt. However, this use is common in informal writings, and formally the question mark is avoided. On the other hand, the question mark in this situation would be replaced by certain words, such as possibly or probably. These examples are provided by Kirkman, (2006,p.89) to illustrate the case:

. . . . results suggest that these cells are normal possibly (?) and that . . .

. . . . requires an increase of 40% ( or more?) before...

Or

. . . results suggest that these cells are normal probably and that ...

. . . requires an increase of 40% possibly before ...

### **4.6.3 Expressing a Polite Request**

Kirkman (2006,p.89) sees that, “We sometimes want to make a polite request, which seems like a question.” Usually, we tend to reach something by making a request, which seems like a question. Theses examples show the third use of the question mark:

Would it be possible to increase our order from 70 to 120 units?

Can I have the salt?

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

The exclamation mark is named also the exclamation point in the USA. According to Kirkman (2006), it is used to express surprise or astonishment. However, this sign is one component of the punctuation marks. It is minimized when dealing with academic or scientific works, in other words there is no appropriate occasions to use it.

According to Trask (1997), there are some common cases where the exclamation mark can be used:

1.Using the exclamation mark to Express a very strong feeling, for example:

- That is fantastic!
- Johnny, do not touch that!
- Good heavens!
- Aaarrgh!

2. In an exclamation beginning with How or What, the exclamation point is usually used, for instance:

- What fools people can be!
- How well Marshall bowled yesterday!

We can Notice that when omitting the words What and How, the sequence would be a statement ending with full stop:

- People can be such fools.
- Marshall bowled very well yesterday.

3. An exclamation mark used to show very surprising statement, for example:

- After months of careful work, the scientists finally opened the tomb. It was empty!

4. The exclamation mark can be used to draw attention to an interruption.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was devoted to punctuations, we have noticed that writing is rigid without punctuation. The latter is very important, because it controls many things in writing, such as meaning and organization. We dealt with some problems concerning punctuations' use, like the misuse or the neglect of this writing component. After that, we have provided rules to the punctuation marks we are dealing with, and each rule is followed by some examples to make it possible to understand the right use of punctuation.

To end up with this chapter, we can say that punctuation is the salt of writing, and if we misuse or neglect it, our written product would lose its taste and, therefore, become misunderstood. This implies particularly for the seven marks of our concern; the comma,

full stop, colon, semi colon, apostrophe, question mark, and the exclamation mark. These marks are frequently used by the students, and they usually fail to use them properly.

## **Chapter Three: Field Work and Data Analysis**

## **Introduction**

The aim of this research study is to demonstrate the role of correct placement of punctuations in enhancing students' academic writing. Also, it is conducted to find out the different problems encountered by the students when using punctuation in their written works. Hence, both teachers' and students' questionnaires, in addition to a text analysis of master on exam papers were conducted.

The students' questionnaire aims at collecting data about students' background information, concerning punctuation in relation with academic writing. The teachers' questionnaire contains questions which aim at knowing the value that teachers give to punctuation, when dealing with the students academic products. Besides, it helps us to know the students ability to use punctuations, according to the teachers. On the other hand, we have analyzed 10 essays as a second research tool, which are taken from the students' written expression exam. They aim at examining students' skill to use punctuations, in precise the comma, full stop, colon, semicolon, apostrophe, question mark, and the exclamation mark.

### **1.Population and Sampling**

For our practical chapter, we have randomly chosen a sample of thirty five master one students of the whole population of the English section at Mohamed Khieder university of Biskra. Age and gender are unwanted variables; they were not taken into consideration.

## 2. Tools of the Research

For our research, we have used two questionnaires one for the students and another one for teachers. Besides, we analyzed ten copies of master one students' written expression exam essays.

### 2.1. The Students' Questionnaire

#### 2.1.1. Description of the Students' Questionnaire

This questionnaire aimed to gather data about our sample's background knowledge about punctuations, in precise the comma, full stop, colon, semicolon, apostrophe, question mark, and the exclamation mark. This questionnaire consists of eighteen question, six are to be answered by "yes" or "no", and the other twelve questions consist of multiple questions, from which students are supposed to chose the appropriate answer(s).

#### 2.1.2 Administration of the Questionnaire

Our questionnaire was administered to our sample of 35 master one students of English. Students did not face problems in understanding it, however, they avoided to explain their choices sometimes, when it was needed.

#### 2.1.3 Analyses of the Students' Questionnaire

**Question 1** : Are you motivated to write?

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	24	68,57%
No	11	31,42%
Total	35	100%

**Table 1: The students' motivation toward writing**



table 01, we have 68,57% of our respondents are motivated to write, whereas 31,42% are not encouraged to write.

**Question 2:** What kind of writing do you conduct?

Alternatives	N	%
Dairies	17	48,57%
Essays	11	31,42%
Short stories	4	11,42%
Dairies +essays	1	2,85%
Dairies +short stories	1	2,85%
total	35	100%

**Table2: Kinds of writing that students usually conduct.**

As table 2 shows, the majority of our respondents conduct dairies with the rate of 48,57%. Then, we have 31,42% state that they write essays. Also, 11,42% tend to write short stories. Last, we have the rate of 2,85% which is repeated twice, one say that he writes both dairies and short stories, and the other say that he writes dairies and essays.

Besides, some of our respondents added that they sometimes write, poems, proverbs.

**Question 3:** How do you classify your level in the writing skill?

Levels	N	%
Very good	1	2,85%
Good	12	34,28%
Average	22	62,85%
Bad	0	0%
Very bad	0	0%
Total	35	100%

**Table 3: Students' levels in the writing skill.**

As we see in table three, most of our respondents with the rate of 62,85% have average level in the writing skill. Besides, 34,28% of them believe that they have a good level, and we have 2,85% have a very good level.

**Question 4:** What makes a good writing?

<b>Alternatives</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Correct grammar	7	20%
Effective punctuation	2	5,71%
Precise vocabulary	3	8,57%
Informative ideas	5	14,28%
Correct grammar +	3	8,57%
Correct grammar	3	8,57%
+precise vocabulary		
Correct grammar	2	5,71%
+informative ideas		
Effective punctuation	2	5,71%
+precise vocabulary		
Effective punctuation	3	8,57%
+informative ideas		
Precise vocabulary	2	5,71%
+informative ideas		
All of them	3	8,57%
total	35	100%

**Table 4:Producing a good written work**

According to 20% of our respondents in table four, correct grammar for the students is the most important factor to have a good writing. They reinforce this point by adding that, grammar is the essence of written language; and others says wrong grammar

means different meaning. Besides, we have 14,28% of the students believe that with an informative idea, the written work would be better.

We have the rate of 8,57% which has been repeated five times; the first is for those who believe that good writing contains precise vocabulary; the second for students who state that correct grammar and effective punctuation would lead to a good writing; the third includes those who think that correct grammar should be followed by precise vocabulary to create a good writing; the fourth is for students who mention that effective punctuation with informative ideas could make good writing; and the last one represents those who see that we have to integrate all of them to have a good writing.

Moreover, the rate of 5,71% is repeated four times. The first one for those who believe that effective punctuation would make a good writing; the second are those who relate correct grammar and informative ideas to have a good writing; the third are students who believe that effective punctuation and precise vocabulary helps the writer to have good writing; and the last one respondents think that good writing is the result of precise vocabulary and informative ideas.

**Question 5:** Are you aware about the punctuation rules?

<b>Options</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	31	88,57%
No	4	11,42%
Total	35	100%

**Table 5: The Students' awareness about punctuations' rules.**

As table five shows, 88,57% of our respondents state that they are aware about punctuations' rules, whereas 11,42% of them are not.

**Question 6:** When a student neglects the punctuation aspect?

Options	N	%
Average	18	51,42%
Incompetent	17	48,57%
Total	35	100%

**Table 6: Students' attitude toward the neglect of the punctuation aspect**

Table six shows that, 51,42% of our respondents believe that, who neglects the punctuation aspect when writing has an average level, whereas 48,57% of them mention that who neglects this writing aspect is considered as an incompetent.

**Question 7:** To what extent you think that punctuation is important when writing

Options	N	%
Very important	29	82,85%
Important	6	17,14%
Total	35	100%

**Table 7: the importance of punctuations in writing**

In table seven, we have 82,85% of our respondents believe that punctuation is very important aspect in the writing process, and (17,14%) of them also have close assumption; they think that writing is very important. The points that have made our respondents widely emphasize on the importance of punctuation in writing for them are; punctuation bring clarity to the written product, relating punctuations to meaning, relating punctuations to coherence and organization.

**Question 8:** How often you face difficulties when dealing with punctuations?

Options	N	%
Always	5	14,28%
Sometimes	27	77,14%
Rarely	3	8,57%
Never	0	0%
Total	35	100%

**Table 8: The times that students face difficulties with punctuation**

Table eight shows that (77,14%) of the students in our sample face difficulties sometimes with punctuations, (14,28%) state that they face difficulties always, and we have (8,57%) of them face difficulties rarely when dealing with the punctuation aspect

**Question 9:** What are the frequent punctuation marks that you fail to use properly?

Alternatives	Number	%
Comma	4	11,42%
Semicolon	7	20%
Semicolon +comma	11	31,42%
Semicolon +colon	2	5,71%
Question mark	1	2,85%
Exclamation mark	1	2,85%
All of them	4	11,42%
Total	30	85,71%

**Table 9: The most difficult punctuation marks for students**

Table nine shows that the comma and the semicolon are the most problematic marks. (31,42%) of our respondents find difficulties when using the comma and the semicolon, (11,42%) of them state that the semicolon is the only problem, and (11,42%) of

the students face problems when using the comma. Also, we have (11,42%) of the students in our sample state that they have problems with all the punctuation marks. Last, we have the rate of (2,85%) which has been repeated two times; one for students who have difficulties when using the question mark, and the other rate for students who find it difficult to deal with the exclamation mark.

**Question 10:** What causes an absence of punctuation mark in writing?

<b>Alternatives</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Ignorance of rules	17	48,57%
Carelessness	7	20%
Lack of concentration	4	11,42%
Assumed unnecessary	2	5,71%
Ignorance of rules and lack of concentration	3	8,57%
Ignorance of rules and carelessness	2	5,71%
Total	35	100%

**Table 10: Causes that lead to the absence of punctuations in written works**

As it is shown in table ten, (48,57%) of our respondents state that students' ignorance of punctuations' rules would effect their performance in punctuating their written products . Also, (20%) of our respondents believe that, students are careless about the punctuation aspect. Then, we have (11,42%) think that it is a question of concentration. (8,57%) of students in our sample state that the absence of punctuations in the students' written products is the result of the ignorance of rules and the lack of concentration. Moreover, we have the rate of (5,71%) which is repeated two time. One concerns those

who think that punctuation marks are not really necessary in writing, and the other are those who ignore and do not care about punctuations.

**Question 11:** What a poorly punctuated academic work might be?

Options	Number	%
Good	3	8,51%
Bad	25	71,42%
Very bad	7	20%
Total	35	100%

**Table 11: the quality of poorly punctuated academic works.**

As it is illustrated in table eleven, most of our respondents, (71,42%), believe that poorly punctuated academic work is always bad. Besides, (20%) of the students mention that academic works would be very bad with poor punctuation; however, there is the rate of (8,51%) of our respondents believe that the academic work might be good even when it is poorly punctuated.

**Question12:** Does your teacher motivate you to use punctuation in your academic products?

Options	Number	%
Yes	31	88,57%
No	4	11,42%
Total	35	100%

**Table 12: Teachers' motivation to students to use punctuations**

In table twelve we have 88,57% of our respondents state that their teachers motivate them to punctuate, whereas 11,42% of them say that their teacher do not encourage them to care about punctuations in academic writing.

**Question 13:** To what extent is the punctuation aspect taking into consideration in the students' assignments?

Options	Number	%
Always	18	51,42%
Sometimes	12	34,28%
Rarely	5	14,28%
never	0	0%
Total	35	35%

**Table 13: The times teacher take punctuations into consideration in the students' assignments**

In table thirteen , we have (51,42%) of our respondents state that their teachers always take the punctuation aspect into consideration when dealing with students' assignments. Then we have (34,28%) say that punctuation is taken sometimes into consideration. Last, the rate of (14,28%) which is for those who mention that punctuation is taken rarely into consideration by the teachers.

**Question 14:** Do you think that one session per week is enough to help the students practice punctuation?

Options	Number	%
Yes	20	57,14%
No	15	42,85%
Total	35	100%

**Table 14: The students' attitudes toward sessions of written expression, and whether they are enough to take care and practice punctuations**

As it is shown in table fourteen, (57,14%) of our respondents state that one session per week is enough to take care about punctuations, whereas (42,85%) of them think that they need more session of written expression. Our respondents suggest that it would be



better if there are two sessions of written expression per week, one is theoretical and the other is to practice the rules

**Question 15:** Do you agree that good punctuation is crucial in all academic products?

<b>Options</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly agree	29	82,85%
Agree	6	17,14%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Total	35	100%

**Table 15: The importance of good punctuations in academic works**

Table fifteen shows that most of our respondents with the rate of (82,85%) are strongly agree that punctuation is an important aspect in academic products. Also, we have (17,14%) are nearly have the same impression. they are agree that punctuation is crucial in the academic works.

Our respondents have reinforced their answers by attractive points for example, “Punctuations help in maintaining organization and coherence in academic works.” Also they believe that, “Because the academic work will be read by professor it should has good punctuation.

**Question 16:** To what extent do you think that your writing conveys the intended meaning with arbitrary punctuations?

Options	Number	%
Always	0	0%
Sometimes	16	45,71%
Rarely	13	37,14
Never	6	17,14%
Total	35	100%

**Table 16: The meaning of a written work with arbitrary punctuations**

In table sixteen, (45,71%) of our respondents think that sometime using punctuations haphazardly would convey the intended meaning. Moreover, we have (37,14%) of them believe that this would happen but rarely. Besides, we have (17,14%) who are totally against the idea that we can transmit the intended meaning with arbitrary punctuations.

Students have evidence that, “Each punctuation mark has its own function which could not fulfilled by the other mark.”

**Question 17:** Would the meaning of a written work change if punctuation marks are used interchangeably?

Options	Number	%
Yes	31	88,57%
No	4	11,42%
Total	35	100%

**Table 17: Using punctuation marks interchangeably and meaning changes**

Table seventeen shows that (88,57%) of our respondents state that the meaning of the written work would change, if we use some marks interchangeably. Then, we have (11,42%) who think the contrast.

**Question 18:** Would the meaning of a written product change if there is an omission of punctuation marks?

Options	Number	%
Yes	34	97,14%
No	1	2,85%
Total	35	100%

**Table 18: The omission of punctuation marks and meaning of written product**

As it is shown in table eighteen, (97,14%) of our respondents state that an omission of punctuation mark would change the meaning. In their explanations, they say that correct punctuations means correct meaning, and poor punctuation means poor meaning. Besides, we have only (2,85%) of the respondents who think the opposite.

## **3.2. Teachers' Questionnaire**

### **3.2.1. Description of the Teachers' Questionnaire**

The teachers' questionnaire aims at gathering data about the role of correct placement of punctuations in enhancing the students' academic writing. Moreover, we intended to know the student's level in the writing process, and in punctuation in precise, according to teachers. Hence, we have conducted a questionnaire which consists of twelve questions. The questions are divided into three sections; questions of personnel information, others about punctuation in relation to writing, and the last one contains others about punctuation in relation to academic writing.

### 3.2.2. Administration of the questionnaire

Our questionnaire was administered to five teachers of written expression in the English section in the university of Biskra. All the questions in the questionnaire have been clearly answered.

### 3.2.3 Analyses of the questionnaire

#### Question 1 : Teacher's degree

Degree	Number	%
PHD	3	60%
MA	2	40%
BA	0	0%
Total	5	100%

**Table 1: Degree held**

Table one shows that 60% of our respondents among teachers have the PHD degree, and 40% of them have the MA degree.

#### Question 2: Time you have been teaching the written expression module

Time	Number	%
10 years	2	40%
4 years	1	20%
3 years	2	40%
Total	5	100%

**Table 2: The time teacher has been teaching written expression**

Table two shows that (40%) of the teachers are teaching written expression since 10 years, (40%) , too, are teaching the module since 3 years, and we have (20%) of our teachers are teaching the module since 4 years.

From table one and two, we would deduce that our respondents among teachers are skilled because of the degrees they have; however, some of them have a short experience in teaching the module of written expression.

**Question 3:** Are you satisfied about the level of your students in the writing skill?

<b>Options</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	0	0%
No	5	100%
Total	5	100%

**Table 3: Teachers' attitudes toward the students level in the writing skill**

As we observe in table three, (100%) of the teachers are not satisfied about the level of their students written expression. according to teachers, students do not have good level in the writing skill.

**Question 4:** Do you agree that punctuation marks are indispensable components in the written language?

<b>options</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	5	100%
No	0	0%
Total	5	100%

**Table 4: the importance of punctuation marks in writing.**

Table four shows that 100% of our respondents believe that punctuation marks are indispensable aspect in the written language. In their explanations, teachers gave us some points about the importance of punctuation marks which are in the same context. Firstly, "Punctuations would expose the student's capacity in writing in general." Secondly, "The real functions of punctuation marks are maintaining meaning, organization, and coherence."

**Question 5:** Classify the following items depending on the importance you give when dealing with the students written products?

Note: Table five is divided into four sections, each one represents one writing aspect and its classifications by teachers.

<b>Grammar</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
1	2	40%	1	0	0%
2	2	40%	2	0	0%
3	1	20%	3	0	0%
4	0	0%	4	5	100%
Total	5	100%	Total	5	100%
<b>Punctuation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Organization of ideas</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
1	0	0%	1	3	60%
2	1	20%	2	2	40%
3	4	80%	3	0	0%
4	0	0%	4	0	0%
Total	5	100%	Total	5	100%

**Table 5: Classifications of the writing components**

The first part of table 5 shows that, (40% of teachers give importance to grammar when dealing with students written works. Also, we have other (40%) of them who consider grammar as the second element, and we have (20%) believed that grammar is the third aspect that teacher should give importance. Vocabulary is classified by all of our respondents, (100%), as the last writing component that teachers should be cautious about, when dealing with students' written products.

Punctuation is classified by (80%) of our respondents among teachers as the third point that should be taken into account, when dealing with students' written works; however, we have (20%) of our respondents mentioned that it is the second thing that they

give importance. Last we have the item of organization of ideas; it is classified by (60%) of our respondents as the first point that should be verified in a student's written work, then we have (40%) of them believed that it is the second point.

**Question 6:** Would the written product be good with poorly punctuated academic works?

Options	Number	%
Yes	0	0%
No	5	100%
Total	5	100%

**Table 6: A poorly punctuated written work and its quality**

In table six, all of our respondents,(100), stated that a poorly punctuated written work is not good.

**Question 7:** How often do your students apply punctuation rules in their written works?

Options	Number	%
Always	0	0%
Sometimes	3	60%
Rarely	2	40%
Never	0	0%
Total	5	100%

**Table 7: Students' applications of punctuation rules**

Table seven shows that (60%) of our respondents stated that their students apply the punctuation rules sometime, whereas we have (40%) of them mentioned that they apply the rules rarely.

**Question 8:** Do you think that punctuation mistakes might be acceptable?

Options	Number	%
Yes	1	20%
No	4	80%
Total	5	100%

**Table 8: Committing a punctuation mistake**

Table eight shows that 80% of our respondents believe that punctuation mistakes are unacceptable when writing. Teacher have reinforced their answer by stating that: Punctuation affect the meaning. punctuation is seen as the code of writing, punctuation is a standard to measure the student's writing ability and punctuation has grammatical and stylistic functions. However, we have 20% of our respondents mentioned that punctuation mistakes are acceptable. The respondents reinforce that by stating that, sometimes punctuation mistakes might be acceptable when they do not effect the organization and comprehension of a written product.

**Question 9:** When a student neglects the punctuation aspect, what he might be?

Options	Number	%
Average	2	40%
Incompetent	3	60%
Total	5	100%

**Table 9: Students' levels with regard to punctuation**

Table nine shows that (60%) of our respondents among teachers believe that when student neglects the punctuation aspect in his writing he is incompetent student writer. Whereas, we have (40%) of the teachers state that the student who neglects this writing aspect has an average level.



**Question 10:** What are the causes of the absence of some punctuation marks in the student's in the students academic works?

Note: This question consists of multiple choices. Hence, numbers here do not represent teachers; instead they represent choices.

Alternatives	Number	%
Ignorance of rule	3	30%
Carelessness	3	30%
Lack of concentration	1	10%
Assumed as unnecessary	3	30%
Total	10	100%

**Table 10: Causes of the absence of punctuation marks**

In the above table, ten of our five respondents gave us ten factors, which might be the cause of the absence of punctuation marks in the students' academic product. We have the percentage of (30%), which have been repeated three times. The first one was given to the ignorance of rule by the students. The second one was provided for the factor of carelessness. Then, we have the third one, which represented that punctuation marks assumed as unnecessary. Moreover, we have (10%) of our respondents believe that the reason of the absence of punctuations in students academic products is the lack of concentration.

**Question 11:** How do you consider misusing punctuations in academic products,

Options	Number	%
Big problem	4	80%
Simple problem	1	20%
Something ordinary	0	0%
Total	5	100%

**Table 11: Misusing punctuations in academic products**

Table eleven shows that (80%) of our respondents mentioned that misusing punctuations in academic products is considered as a big problem. Teacher proved the point by stating that punctuations would preserve organization, coherence, and clarity in all academic works. However, (20%) of the respondents believe that it is a simple problem.

**Question 12:** What are the common punctuation marks that students fail to use properly?

Note: the following table is organized as the one in question ten, however we have 15 choices (numbers refer to choices).

<b>Alternatives</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Comma	5	33,33%
Semicolon	4	26,66
Full stop	4	26,66
Colon	2	13,33
Total	15	100%

**Table12: The most problematic punctuation marks for students**

It is shown in table twelve that (33,33%) of the most problematic marks for the students is the comma. Then, we have the percentage of (26,66%), which is repeated two times, one is for the semicolon and the other is for the full stop. 13,33% of the choices provided by our respondents is for the colon.

**Question 13:** Does the use of some punctuation marks interchangeably change the written meaning?

<b>Options</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	5	100%
No	0	0%
Total	5	100%

### **Table 13: Using punctuation marks interchangeably**

Table thirteen shows that 100% our respondents believe that punctuation marks could not be used interchangeably, because for them the written meaning would change. All the teachers emphasize on the point that each punctuation mark got a function which could not be fulfilled by an other mark.

## **3.3 Students' essays analysis**

### **3.3.1 Description of the essays**

The text is conducted to evaluate the students use and misuse of punctuation marks in precise the comma, the full stop, the colon, the semicolon, the question mark, the exclamation mark, and the apostrophe. Also, through the text we would compare between the students and teachers answers and the students applications of punctuations. Our study consists of taking students' essays and test their use of these marks.

The essays were the exam of written expression. We did not interfere to ask the students directly. Instead, we have requested from the administration to give us copies, because of time constraints. Since these essays were written individually; which means students worked, more or less, it is an unwanted variable. We think that this way of testing punctuations is better and faithful than giving them an authentic text to punctuate. If we asked them to do this, students would cheat, help each other, and try to use their best to put as much punctuations as possible.

### **3.3.2 Administration of the essays**

We have taken 10 samples of the students' written expression exam papers, which were provided by the head of the section, regardless the genre and the mark. Due to

students ignore that their essays were to be analyzed and taken into consideration in our research, which means that the students have worked in a spontaneous way.

### 3.3.3 Analysis of the Results

students	The needed full stops	Full stops used		Full stops missed	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
S1	16	10	62,5%	6	37,5%
S2	12	21	95,45%	1	4,54%
S3	13	12	92,30%	1	7,69%
S4	22	20	90,90%	2	9,09%
S5	23	16	69,56%	7	30,43%
S6	14	9	64,28%	5	35,71%
S7	13	12	92,30%	1	7,69%
S8	16	14	87,5%	2	12,5%
S9	15	14	93,33%	1	6,66%
S10	22	20	90,90%	2	9,09%

**Table 1: Number of full stops used and missed**

Concerning the use of full stop, student one has used (62,5%) of the acquired full stops in his essay. Then, we have student two who has missed only (4,54%) of the needed periods. We have student three has missed (7,69%) of the whole full stops. The fourth student has used (90,90%) of the acquired full stops is his written product. Student five has used only (69,56%) of the needed periods is his essay. Student six has used only (64,28%) of the full stops that should be used. Student seven has used (92,30%) of the whole full stops in his essay. Student eight has used (87,5%) of the acquired full stops. Student nine has missed (6,66%) of the full stops that had to be used. The last student has used (90,90%) of the needed periods in his essay. We can say that, students have an acceptable use of the full stop.

Students	The needed commas	Commas used		Commas missed	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
S1	23	13	56,52%	10	43,47%
S2	28	21	75%	7	25%
S3	22	9	40,90%	13	59,09%
S4	40	31	77,5%	9	22,5%
S5	43	25	58,13%	18	41,86%
S6	21	17	90,47%	4	19,04%
S7	17	13	76,47%	4	23,52%
S8	28	23	82,14%	5	17,85%
S9	19	9	47,36%	10	52,63%
S10	35	32	91,42%	3	8,57%

**Table 2: Number of commas used and missed**

As we observe in table 4.2, student one has missed (43,47%) of the acquired commas in his essay. Student two has used (75%) of the needed commas in his essay. The third student has only used (40,90%) of the needed commas. Student four has used (77,5%) of the acquired commas in missed only (19,04%) of the needed commas. Student seven has used (76,47%) of the acquired commas. Student eight has used (82,14%) of the acquired commas in his essay. Student nine his missed 52,63% of the needed commas. The last student in the sample has missed just (8,57%) of the acquired commas in his essay.

students	The needed semicolons	Semicolons used		Semicolons missed	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
S1	2	0	0%	2	100%
S2	2	0	0%	2	100%
S3	3	0	0%	3	100%
S4	2	0	0%	2	100%
S5	5	2	40%	3	60%
S6	4	1	25%	3	75%
S9	5	1	20%	4	80%
S10	3	0	0%	3	100%

**Table 3: Number of semicolons used and missed**

The results in table 4.3 shows that, student one, two, three, four, and ten have not used any semicolon in their essays, and they have missed (100%) . each one the following student: one, two, and four have needed 2 semicolons in their essays, whereas students three and ten have needed three semicolons. Besides, we have student five has missed (60%) of the needed semicolons in his essay, student six has used only (25%) of the acquired semicolons, and student nine has missed (80%) of the needed semicolons in his work. Then, we have student seven and eight did not any semicolon in their essays.

Students	The needed colons	The used colons		The missed colons	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
S1	2	0	0%	2	100%
S2	1	0	0%	1	100%
S3	3	1	33,33%	2	66,66%
S4	5	0	0%	3	100%
S5	6	0	0%	6	100%
S6	1	1	100%	0	0%
S7	3	3	100%	0	0%
S8	4	2	50%	2	50%
S9	1	0	0%	1	100%

**Table 4: Number of colons used and missed**

Student one has needed two colons and he missed them. Both of Student, two and nine has needed one colon in their essays and they have missed them. Student five has needed six colon and he has missed all of them. Student three has missed (66,66%) of the acquired colons, and student eight has used (50%) of the needed colons in his essay. We have student six and seven has used (100%) of the needed colons in their essays. Last, student ten did not need any colon in his written work.

Students	The needed question marks	The used question marks		The missed question marks	
		Number	%	Number	%
S2	2	2	100%	0	%
S5	1	1	100%	0	0%
S8	3	1	33,33%	2	66,66%
S9	2	2	100%	0	0%

**Table 5: Number of question marks used and missed**

As it is shown in table 4.5, student two has needed 2 question mark and he had used them. Student five has acquired 1 question mark in his essay and he has used it. Student

eight has needed 3 question marks and he has used one and missed two. Student nine has needed two question marks and he has used them.

Students	The needed apostrophes	The used apostrophes		The missed apostrophes	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	2	2	100%	0	0%
2	3	3	100%	0	0%
3	3	3	100%	0	0%
6	2	2	100%	0	0%
8	4	4	100%	0	0%
9	1	1	100%	0	0%
10	2	1	50%	1	50%

**Table 6: Number of apostrophes used and missed**

As we observe in table 4.6, student one and six have needed two apostrophes in their essays and they have put them. Student two and three have acquired three apostrophes and they have used them. Student eight has needed four apostrophes and he has put them. Student nine has needed only one apostrophe in his essay and he has put it. Last, we have student ten who needed two apostrophes, and he has used one and missed the other apostrophe.

#### **4. Discussion of the Results**

From the results obtained from the students' and teachers' questionnaires, and the one gained from the students' essay analysis, we can deduce that there are disagreement in the students' answers. It is obvious in the students point of views about academic writing,



and punctuation and their performances in the essays. Also, a disagreements with their teachers' answers.

In the students' questionnaire, (table 01) shows that (68,57%) of our students are motivated to write, which approximately represent the half number of the students. As far as academic writing is concerned, (table02) shows that 48,57% of our respondents among students tend to write diaries, which are not academic. We would deduce that a carelessness of the punctuation aspect might exist in this kind of written product. However, most of students in (table03) said that they have an average level in the writing skill. The same question, nearly, was asked to the teachers, and (100%) of them stated that they are not satisfied about the level of their students in writing. Hence, what we have discussed is an indicator to weak level in the writing skill, and in punctuations as a part of the writing process.

The underestimation and ignorance of punctuation is illustrated also by the students in (table04), and in teachers' questionnaire in (table05). Both, teachers and students answers consider punctuation as a secondary point that should be taken into consideration when dealing with the students written works. An importance is given to grammar and informative ideas at the expense of punctuation ; however, punctuation has a strong relation with grammar, and it is a tool to make ideas informative. Besides, (table05) in the students questionnaire shows that (88,75%) of the students are not aware about punctuation rules. The same point is illustrated by teachers in (table7), where (60%) of them stated that only sometimes their students apply the punctuation rules in their written assignments. The students' essays have revealed that the students have an arbitrary use of punctuations.

From our analysis, we find that the two questionnaires are interrelated and serves each other. Besides, they are concretely reinforced by the results that found from the essays

analysis. In (table06), none of our respondents among the students believe that a student who neglects the punctuation aspect might be competent, and the majority of our teachers sample( 80%) held the same assumption that punctuation mistakes are unacceptable. (Table07) reveals the contradictions exist in the students answers. However, they think that punctuation is very important in writing by the rate of (82,85%). Yet, they have stated in (table06) that the neglect of the punctuation aspect might occur by a student who has an average level.

The agreement is, also, present and observable from the analysis of the essays and the questionnaires. In the texts analysis (tables 2and3) show that the most problematic punctuation marks for the students are the comma and the semicolon. The former is clearly illustrated in (table2) where the students' accuracy in using the comma is, approximately, less than 60% with regard to the performance of all the students. The latter is deduced from (table3) in the text analysis. We can observe that just three students have used the semicolons in their essays; whereas, eight of them needed this mark in their essays. The students' questionnaire (table9) shows that the comma is seen to be the most problematic mark by (11,42%); the semicolon is represented by( 20%); and(31,32%) of the students find problems with both of them. So (62,84%) of the respondents face problems when using those marks. Furthermore, the teachers' questionnaire affirms the same results in (table12). (59,99%) of the respondents among teachers confirmed that the comma and the semicolon are the most problematic marks for their students.

In the students' questionnaire and in (table10), we have (48,57%) of the respondents believe that the absence of punctuations in the students' written product is due to the ignorance of the rules. Our respondents among teachers think that the absence of this writing aspect is also due to ignorance of rules, carelessness, and that punctuations

assumed unnecessary by the students. Besides, all teachers in (table06), by the rate of (100%), asserted that a poorly punctuated academic work is always weak. The students' essays show the contrast to what students said in (table12). (88,57%) of them stated that they are motivated by their teachers to use punctuation; however, their essays show that punctuation did not take its real value when writing.

A noticeable low level in the writing skill and in the punctuation in specific, by the students. Yet, (57,14%) of the students in (table14) answered that the allotted time for written expression and punctuation is enough to pay attention for punctuations. In the teachers questionnaire in (table13), we have (100%) of the teachers who have affirmed that using punctuation marks interchangeably would change the written meaning; that is to say that no punctuation mark is worth to substitute the other. The same point is asserted by the students in (tables16, 17 and18). Most of the students believe that any misuse or omission of a punctuation mark in a written work would change the written meaning.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter, we can say that there is a disagreement between what students said in the questionnaire, and their performance in the essays. According to the results obtained in both the students' and teaches' questionnaires, punctuation is very important aspect in academic writing to convey the exact meaning. Yet, this awareness by the students is absent in their essays. So, what they said was not what they did. Hence, this weak performance by the students in using punctuation marks needs more collaboration between the teachers and the students to raise their students' awareness to have comprehensible piece of writings.

## General Conclusion

Through this work, we attempted to pose the problem of punctuation which master one students in the English section of Mohamed Khieder university of Biskra, encounter. In this study, we have discussed the role of correct placement of punctuations in enhancing students' academic writing. Besides, we dealt with the different functions of each mark to raise students' awareness of these important marks.

In the first chapter, "Academic Writing: Different Aspects", we started with a definition of writing and its importance. Then, a definition of academic writing, and the writing process. Also, this chapter has included the objectives of academic products, and the vocabulary which characterizes any academic written work. The chapter is closed by an overview about plagiarism in academic writing.

The second chapter consists of a definition of punctuation and its importance while writing; then we discussed some of its problems mainly the misuse and the neglect. Finally, we shed light on punctuation marks of our including the full stop, the comma, the semicolon, the colon, the question mark, the exclamation mark and the apostrophe. A definition was given to each punctuation mark; followed by some examples.

For our practical part, three tools were conducted; teachers' and students' questionnaires, and a text analysis. The students' questionnaire aimed at gathering data about the students' background towards punctuation in relation to academic writing. The teaches' questionnaire intended to recognize the teachers' attitude about the importance of punctuation, and their opinion towards the level of their students in writing and specifically in academic writing. The text involved the students' essays of written expression exam, where we evaluate their use of punctuation marks.

The results obtained from the students' questionnaire show that students are aware of the importance of the correct placement of punctuations in academic writing. Yet, the

teachers have answered that their students do not apply punctuations' rules in their assignments. Moreover, the students' performance in their essays is contradicted to their answers, where the results show that the students are not cautious about punctuation marks and have a weak performance, especially the comma and the semicolon.

The students' and teachers' questionnaires have answered our questions. That is to say, a correct placement of punctuation marks has an effective role in conveying a meaning. Besides, the two tools, questionnaires, have affirmed our hypothesis, that whenever punctuation marks are used properly, the academic work would be comprehensible and organized.

The students' essays have revealed the disagreement exists between the students' answers and their performance. The obtained findings, also, have helped us to recognize the most problematic punctuation marks for the students, which are the comma and the semicolon. The essays, concretely, show the low level in using punctuation marks by the students (master one students).

## **Recommendations**

Depending on the results gained, as results have shown in the questionnaires and in the essays, and to make the students aware of the importance of good punctuation and have comprehensible and organized academic writing. Our recommendations are the following:

Due to that the students have a lack of motivation towards writing and their unsatisfied level of writing, the teacher should find strategies to make the students eager to write for example, let the student choice the topic he want to write about. Students would have better performance in writing, as long as they are practicing. Consequently, that would be reflected on their performances in using punctuation, and it would be better too.

The comma and the semicolon are the most problematic punctuation marks for the students. Hence, the teacher has to help the students to have better performances in using those marks. For instance, when correcting students' tests, teachers should emphasize on the use of the comma and the semicolon. Whenever the teacher gives successive remarks on the students' papers, their ability would develop and be better.

Home works are very important to give much more time and practices to the punctuation aspect. Regardless the time of the schedule, teachers should try to intensify home works to have the chance to specify more to punctuation. For instance, one homework per week would help in raising the students' awareness about punctuations. (for master one students).

We hope that our research has, usefully, helped to highlight one of the difficulties our students have, precisely our master one students. We, also, hope that we have participated by certain solutions to enhance the use of punctuations in academic works by the students.

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# **APPENDICES**

**Appendix: 01**

**Students' Questionnaire**

The current questionnaire serves as a data collecting tool for a research about **the Role of Correct Placement of Punctuation in Enhancing Students' Academic Writing**, for obtaining a Master's degree in applied linguistics. You are kindly requested to fill in this questionnaire, in order to help us to examine your background about the use of punctuation.

In advance you are kindly thanked for your contribution, that would be appreciated, in fulfilling this research.

**Section one: Writing in General**

1- are you motivated to write?

-yes  -no

2-what kind of writing do you conduct?

-dairies  -essays  -short stories

Others.....  
.....

3-how do you classify your level in the writing skill?

-very good  -good  -average  -low  -very low

4- in your opinion, what makes a good writing?

-correct grammar  - effective punctuation  - effective punctuation

-informative ideas

Why?.....  
.....

**Section two: Punctuation and Writing**

5-are you aware about the punctuations' rules?

-yes  -No

6- when a student neglects the punctuation aspect, he is?

-incompetent  -average

7- to what extent you think that punctuation is important when writing?

-very important  -important

Why?.....  
.....

8- How often you face difficulties when dealing with punctuations in your writing?

-always  -sometimes  -rarely  -never

9- what are the frequent punctuation marks that you fail to use properly?

- - - -

10-in your opinion, an absence of punctuation mark when writing is due to?

-ignorance of rules  -carelessness

-lack of concentration  -assumed as unnecessary

Others? - - -

### Section three: Academic Writing and Punctuation

11- a poorly punctuated academic work, for you, might be?

-good  -bad  -very bad

why?.....  
.....

12- does your teacher motivate you to use punctuation in your academic products?

-yes  -no

13- to what extent is punctuation aspect taking into consideration in the students' assignments?

-always  -sometimes  -rarely  -never

14- do you think that one session per week is enough to help students practice punctuation?

-yes  -no

If no, what do you

suggest?.....

.....

15-do you agree that good punctuation is a crucial aspect of all academic products?

-strongly agree  -agree  -disagree  -strongly disagree

why?.....

.....

**Section four: Punctuation and Meaning**

16-to what extent do your writing conveys the meaning with haphazard punctuation ?

-always  -sometimes  -Rarely  -never

Why?.....

.....

17- would the meaning of a written work change if some punctuation marks are used interchangeably?

-yes  -no

If yes, explain how.....

.....

18- would the meaning of a written product change if there is an omission of punctuation?

-yes  -no

why?.....

.....

**Appendix: 02**

**Teachers' Questionnaire**

Dear teacher

You are kindly asked to fill in this questionnaire which serves as a data collecting tool for a research about **the Role of Correct Placement of Punctuation in Enhancing Students' Academic Writing**. The research is conducted to obtain a Master's degree in applied linguistics.

In advance, we would appreciate your contribution which would help us in fulfilling the research.

**Section one: personnel information**

1-Degree

BA (licence)  MA (Master/Magister)  PhD (Doctorate)

2-Time you have been teaching written expression module

Year(s)

3-Are you satisfied with the level of your students in the writing skill?

Yes  no

**Section two: punctuation and writing**

4- Do you agree that punctuation marks are indispensable component in the written language?

Yes  No

Why?.....  
.....  
.....

5-Classify the following items depending on the importance you give when dealing with the students written products just by putting 1, 2, 3, 4 in the white blank.

Grammar  vocabulary  punctuation  organization of ideas

6- Would the written product be good with a poorly punctuated work.

Yes  No

7- How often do your students apply punctuations' rules in their written works?

Always  sometimes  rarely  never

8- Do you think that punctuation' mistakes might be acceptable?

Yes  No

Why?.....  
.....  
.....

9- When a student neglects the punctuation aspect, what he might be ?

Average  Incompetent

**Section three: Academic writing and punctuation**

10- The absence of some punctuation marks in the students' academic products is, often, due to:

Ignorance of rules  Carelessness   
Lack of concentration  Assumed as unnecessary

Others.....  
.....  
.....

11-Misusing punctuations in an academic product is considered as:

Big problem  Simple mistake  Something ordinary

Why?.....  
.....  
.....

12- What are the common marks that students fail to use properly in their assignments?

- - - - -

13- Does the use of some punctuation marks interchangeably change the written meaning?

Yes  No

Why?.....  
.....  
.....

Appendix: 03

Module : *Written expression* Année : *Master 1* Groupe : *03*

Date : *13/01/2016*

N° d'anonymat

N° d'anonymat

Note

*13*  
*20*

*Topic choice :*

*Title : The "What" or the "How" writing?*

*There are a number of different approaches to the practice of writing skills, both in and outside the classroom. Mainly, they can be summarized into two different approaches : The product writing and the process writing.*

*The product approach is the one that gives more priority to the linguistic knowledge rather than the way of writing. That is to say, it focuses on the final product, neglecting the steps of writing. This approach considers writing as going through : familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing, and then free writing. It is criticized by its use of imitation.*



In contrast to the product approach, the process approach focuses on the way of writing, considering the classroom as workshops and communities where the teacher and learners work together. It gives more importance to the development of the linguistic skills, more than the linguistic knowledge. According to Steel, writing goes through specific steps that are: Brainstorming, planning, mind mapping, writing the first draft, peer feedback, editing, writing the final draft and teacher evaluation. Thus, this view considers writing as thinking not imitation. Following this approach takes a lot of time, and it needs from the teacher to be a researcher.

To conclude, these two approaches did not fit all the students. They have some breakdowns. However, they can be used to develop creative writing.

## المخلص

هذا العمل يهدف الى ابراز الدور المهم لعلامات الوقف في الكتابة الأكاديمية للغة الانجليزية. الدراسة توضح كيف الاستعمال السليم لعلامات الوقف وبالتحديد: الفاصلة، النقطة، النقطتان، الفاصلة المنقوطة، الفاصلة العليا، علامة الاستفهام وعلامة التعجب يساعد على اوصول المعنى الدقيق والحفاظ على تنظيم الكتابة. من خلال الفرضية، اردنا تبين دور الوضع الصحيح لعلامات الوقف في تحسين الكتابة الأكاديمية للطلاب. فرضيتنا أكدت من خلال استطلاعات الطلبة والأساتذة؛ استطلاع قدم لطلبة الأولى ماستر نموذج من خمسة وثلاثون طالب واستطلاع لخمس أساتذة في قسم الانجليزية لجامعة محمد خيضر بسكرة. أيضا، قمنا بتحليل عشر نماذج لمقالات امتحانات التعبير الكتابي للطلبة. النتائج التي تحصلنا عليها من استطلاعات الطلبة كانت متناقضة مع أداءهم في المقال. في الاستطلاع، الطلبة بدا انهم كانوا على علم بالدور المهم لعلامات الوقف، ومع ذلك لم نرى توظيف صحيح لعلامات الوقف في مقالاتهم.