

Brackets vs. Parentheses



Brackets:

In a paper, use brackets to signify important information added to direct quotes. The brackets tell the reader that the information is added to further explain the quote. The use of brackets may come in a few forms:

1. To explain further, correct, or comment within a direct quotation:

Ex. According to one student, “the [writing] center is a helpful resource.”

**Notice that [writing] is added to specify which center the student is referring to.*

Ex. The dance instructor eventually becomes frustrated with Teresa’s missteps and scolds her:

“...Teresa, donde estas hoy? [where are you today?”

**Notice that the brackets are used to translate the Spanish words into English.*

Ex. Mrs. Martin indicated on Ava’s report card that she has been “well behaved, eager to participate, and fiendly [*sic*] with her peers.”

Note: The Latin word sic (“thus, so”) is used in brackets to indicate that the writer copied the original text exactly in the quotation, but believes that the word directly before sic is an error or questionable.

2. To alter part of a word, indicating necessary changes from its original form:

Ex. Original sentence: “In a paper, use brackets to signify important information added to direct or block quotes.”

Sentence included in text: After reading the bracket handout, Sally writes her science paper “us[ing] brackets to signify important information added to direct or block quotes.”

3. To replace parentheses within parentheses:

Ex. Nancy noticed that her daughter, Tabatha, tends to omit “s” sounds while speaking. Concerned that Tabatha may need special speech assistance, Nancy consulted with the elementary school. (The school’s speech-language pathologist [SLP] will need to meet with both Nancy and Tabatha.)

**Notice that the writer places the acronym for speech-language pathologist in brackets within the parentheses.*



Parentheses:

In a paper, use parentheses to indicate information that is supplementary. The additional information can add explanations, examples, or details to the text. The use of parentheses may come in a few forms:

1. To indicate supplemental information within a sentence:

Ex. The bear(s) ate the food the campers planned to eat during their five-mile hike (as they did not properly store the meals).

Note: In the first use, the “(s)” denotes that it could have been one bear (singular) or more than one bear (plural) that ate the food. In the second use of parentheses, the writer supplements the topic by adding information about why the bear was able to eat the food.

**Notice that the punctuation mark is placed outside of the parentheses. This is because the supplemental information in parentheses is a part of the original sentence structure.*

Ex. Each year, students enjoy the humorous stories Mr. Johnson shares while teaching his History of Human Behavior course. (He was nominated for the Award for Teaching Excellence.)

**Notice that the punctuation mark is inside the parentheses. This is because the supplemental information inside the parentheses is not part of the original sentence. The information itself is its own sentence.*

2. To enclose numbers or letters when listing:

Ex. The elementary students in Mrs. Joan’s first grade class are learning the colors of the rainbow: (1) red, (2) orange, (3) yellow, (4) green, (5) blue, (6) indigo, and (7) violet.

The following resources were consulted in the design of this handout:

Harris, M. (2008). *Prentice hall reference guide* (7th ed.) New Jersey: Upper Saddle River.

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The College of Saint Rose Writing Center, 2008

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