

Writing Notes for the CAHSEE

The following information is not meant to be a complete guide to punctuation, but rather a source of basic information to help you practice for the ELA portion of the CAHSEE that tests these areas.

Capitalization

1. Capitalize the word I whenever it appears.
Example: May I go with you?
2. Capitalize the first word in a sentence.
Example: Rake the leaves into a pile.
3. Capitalize the first word in a direct quotation.
Examples: She answered, "My name is Martha."
"How long?" he asked, "have you been here?"
4. Capitalize proper nouns. Proper nouns name a particular person, place or thing.
Examples:

Names: Jane, John Doe

Initials in names: John L. Lewis

Names with titles: Principal Hernandez, President Bush

Cities: Fresno

States: California

Countries: United States, Canada

Geographic features: Pacific Ocean, Mt. Everest

Geographic regions: Europe, Asia, Pacific Northwest

Streets: Elm St., 4th Ave., Lincoln Lane

Parks: Yellowstone Nation Park

Specific Places: Heartland High School (but not just *high school* unless it is named, because it is not a *specific* high school)

Days, holidays, months: Tuesday, July 4th, January

Special events: World War II, Summer Celebration

Organizations, businesses, stores: Red Cross, Sierra Club, Home Depot

Nationalities, languages, religions & races: German, Mexican, Chinese

Brand Names: Big Mac, Ivory Soap

Titles: *A Child Called It* (book); *Star Wars* (movie)

Punctuation

Ending marks & sentences

1. The period is used to end a declarative sentence. A declarative sentence makes a statement. It tells us something.

Examples: It is raining. The airplane landed on time.

2. The period is also used to end an imperative sentence. An imperative sentence commands or requests that you do something.

Examples: Please lock the door. Put the book away.

3. The period is also used with abbreviations. Common abbreviations are used for days of the week, months, titles, and initials.

Examples: Tuesdays-Tues.

January- Jan.

Doctor- Dr.

Mister- Mr.

Street- St.

Avenue- Ave.

A.C. Smith, Jr.

week - wk

before noon- A.M.

before Christ- B.C.

4. The question mark is used at the end of an interrogatory sentence. An interrogatory sentence *asks* something.

Example: What time is it? Do you have an extra pencil?

5. The exclamation mark is used to end an exclamatory sentence. An exclamatory sentence shows surprise or very strong feeling.

Examples: Ouch, that hurt! Stop! Don't take that!

Their / They're / There

These words are homonyms. They sound alike but have different meanings. It is important that you know the difference.

Use "*their*" when you are referring to ownership.

It was *their* turn. (The turn belongs to them.)

Let's go to *their* house after school. (The house belongs to them.)

It's *their* choice. (The choice belongs to them.)

"*There*" refers to place or existence.

Go over *there*. (There is the place you are to go to.)

There are four people *here*. (Four people exist *here*.)

There was no hope. (No hope existed.)

"*They're*" is the contraction for "they are".

They're always late. (They are always late.
I know they're going to buy a new car. (I know they are going to buy a new car.)

To / Too / Two

The word "to" the version you use most often.

Ex: Give it to them.

The word "too" means "also" and is usually set apart with a comma.

Ex: I went there, too.

She, too, decided to make up her credits and graduate on time.

The word "two" means "2".

Ex: I have two books.

Commas

Dates & Addressess

Use commas to specify dates & addresses.

Examples: Tuesday, January 11th

July 4, 1776

He was born on May 31, 1955, in the morning.

Fresno, California

Riverside, California

I go to school at 2269 Sylvia St., Selma, Calif.

Use a comma before and after the year when the month and day are given.

March 27, 2007, was the day he enrolled.

A comma is NOT needed when only the month and year are given.

March 2007 was when he enrolled.

Use a comma in sentences before and after a state or country, when the name of the city is stated.

Seattle, Washington, is north of Portland, Oregon.

Selma is located south of Fresno, California. (Selma is not followed by a state so no comma is needed.)

Selma, California, is located south of Fresno.

Introductory words & phrases

Use commas to set off words like *yes*, *no*, or *well* when they introduce a sentence.

Yes, I will answer the phone. Well, I was late. No, I didn't do it.

Introductory words can also be short phrases.

By the way, did you get an answer? *Of course*, I may never know.

First of all, I'm not sure it happened that way.

Use a comma to set off names of people to whom you are speaking or writing.

Juan, please put that away. You turned it in yesterday, Lilly.

Thank you, Cindy, for helping me.

Use commas between words (or phrases) in a series of three or more.

Example: I have selected Tom, Juan, and Maria to pass out the papers.

(*Tom, Juan, and Maria* = series of three.)

Example of phrases in a series: I graded papers, filled out forms, and completed reports cards after school.

Compound sentences

Use a comma before conjunctions (joining words) like *and*, *or*, and *but* in a compound sentence.

Examples: 1.) Fresno is a big city, and it has many people. = 1 sentence, 2 complete ideas
(Fresno is a big city. It has many people. = 2 sentences, 2 complete ideas)

2.) You can go to the library, or you can stay home.

(You can go to the library. You can stay home.)

Commas: appositives

Words or phrases that rename the words or phrases that follow them are appositives. They are separated with commas.

Alex, *my cousin*, is my best friend. (*my cousin* renames Alex)

Our neighbors, *the Molanos*, are very friendly. (*the Molanos* identifies the neighbors)

She will feed Dutch, *my dog*. (*my dog* identifies Dutch)

Apostrophes: contractions

Contractions are made when two words are combined to make one word. An apostrophe is used to show where one or more letters have been left out when the words were combined.

it + is = it's

we + will = we'll

you + are = you're

I + am = I'm

will + not = won't

Use an apostrophe to show the possessive form of a singular noun. For a one syllable words ending in "s", add an apostrophe and "s" ('s).

cat + 's = cat's

the cat's tail

woman + 's = woman's

the woman's home

James + 's = James's

James's house

Use just the apostrophe to form the possessive of a singular noun having two or more syllables and ending with the “s” or “z” sound.

Collins + ‘ = Collins’	Mr. Collins’ coat
Perez + ‘ = Perez’	Mr. Perez’ car
Moses + ‘ = Moses’	Moses’ brother

Use an apostrophe to form the possessive of a plural noun ending in “s”.

Girls	girls’	the girls’ game
Stories	stories’	the stories’ ending

Quotation Marks & Commas in Quotations

Quotation marks are used to show a speaker’s exact words. Capitalize the first word the speaker says. A comma is used to separate the person who is talking from what they say.

“How far is it to school?” asked Doug.
Sara answered, “It is two miles.”
Ms. Mats said, “Come in and find a place to sit.”
“Sit over here,” said Mr. Collazo.
“Come in,” said Mrs. Wayne, “and sit right here.”
Tom yelled, “Stop that!”

Colons

Colons can be used to introduce lists, explanations, or separate numbers.

Re: Invoice #2345
I saw the sign too late: No U turn.
Class is dismissed at 2:20 p.m.
Please keep the following items in your binder: pencil, paper, notes, and your homework.

Semicolons

To join two independent clauses (simple sentences that can stand alone) when there is no connecting word like *and* or *but*, you can use a semicolon.

I don’t take my sister to the park to play; she takes me.

I took the CAHSEE last semester but only passed one section; therefore, I will be taking the other section again.

Abbreviations

An abbreviation is a shortened word (or phrase) usually followed by a period.

*A common test tactic is to use an abbreviation but not include the period that should be following it to see if the test-taker realizes that the abbreviation is incorrect.

Mr. = Mister

Mrs. = a married woman

Ms. = a title that can be used for all women, married or single

Dr. = doctor

Maj. = major

Gov. = governor

Rev. = reverend

Some titles follow names, such as: Dr. Frank Hernandez, M.D.

M.D. = medical doctor

Jr. = junior Tom Smith, Jr.

Sr. = senior Tom Smith, Sr.

Acronyms

Acronyms are made when you use the first letter of a name to make an abbreviation.

Acronyms are written without periods unless they are written using lower case letters.

FBI = Federal Bureau of Investigation

CIA = Central Intelligence Agency

IRS = Internal Revenue Service

MADD = Mothers Against Drunk Driving

FYI = for your information

e.g. = (exempli gratia) for example)

i.e. (id est) in other words

c.o.d. (collect on delivery)