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Using parentheses, brackets, and braces properly is crucial for clarity and precision in textual communication. It ensures accurate and effective delivery of information.

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Parentheses, Brackets & Braces

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Parentheses, Brackets & Braces

Often overlooked, parentheses, braces, and brackets are essential typographic tools. They enhance readability and help convey complex information. They are visually distinct symbols that harmonize with the alpha/numeric characters in a font.

○ [] }	○ [] }	() [] }	() [] }
○ [] }	() [] }	● [] }	() [] }



Parentheses are used to enclose, or set off, information that is explanatory, qualifying or incidental. Items generally set off by parentheses include: abbreviations and acronyms, area codes and time zones, as well as numbered or lettered lists or rankings. A parenthetical phrase can be used in the middle of a sentence or at the end, directly preceding the period. If the parenthetical statement is a complete thought, it follows the period.

Parentheses are used to enclose material that is explanatory or qualifying in nature. This includes (but is not limited to) acronyms, abbreviations, area and ZIP codes.

$$5 + (2 \times 3) = 11$$

Parentheses are used to enclose text and math equations



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Brackets are generally used to set off additional textual content within a parenthetical phrase, as a way to avoid the “nesting” of parentheses. Brackets are also used to enclose explanations or comments by an author, editor or publisher; to note a definition, translation or pronunciation; to clarify an omission; and to provide the source of a quotation. They appear in mathematics and chemistry, as well as in programming languages.

(Brackets are commonly used to enclose material within a parenthetical phrase [copy already enclosed within parentheses] to avoid the use of parentheses within parentheses.)



Braces are a more decorative form of bracket. They serve various purposes, including denoting sets in mathematics (e.g., {x, y, z}), grouping items in programming languages, and enclosing options in bibliographic references (e.g., {et al.}). In informal writing, braces can indicate emphasis or convey a playful tone. Additionally, they are used to indicate attributes in linguistics, such as in phonetic transcriptions. They can also be used as oversized decorative and ornamental elements.

Braces can also be used as oversized decorative graphic elements either related or unrelated to the actual text.



Parentheses, braces and brackets should be centered vertically next to the text they enclose. In most typefaces, these marks are designed to center vertically on the lowercase x-height. If they are enclosing all caps, or lining figures, they may need to be raised slightly.

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Adjust the positioning of parentheses, brackets or braces to center them vertically with their content.



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Typefaces used in this article

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