

Parentheses and Brackets

Parentheses

A pair of parentheses (...) sets off information that is not crucial to the sentence meaning.

- *Formal grammar (rarely taught formally in school) is a useful tool for the writer.*

Parentheses are also used in some documentation systems. Consult a handbook or the relevant citation guide for your discipline.

The frequent use of parentheses can slow down your prose, and may be a sign that you are padding your work with information that does not really contribute to your point.

Brackets

Square brackets [...] are used in academic prose to indicate an editorial comment, that is, a note by the writer about the writing.

Use square brackets with the Latin word *sic* (which means “thus”) when you are quoting an incorrect or unusual usage in the original.

- *He wrote, “it’s [sic] quality is undoubted.”*

Use square brackets when you have clarified or changed a quotation so that it reads correctly in its new context.

- *“[Eliot’s] novel is a masterpiece,” agree the critics. (Original: “Her novel is a masterpiece.”)*

Square brackets are also used in the rare case (which should be [very] rare indeed) of needing to put a word or phrase in parentheses within another set of parentheses.

Angle brackets <> are sometimes used to enclose a URL.