Parentheses ( )

Purpose:

• Provide extra/nonessential information.
• Separate material (a word, phrase, or sentence) from the main part of the sentence.
• De-emphasize the importance of the material in the parentheses.

Example: Tragically, Clay Aiken (a talented singer) did not win American Idol.

Punctuation:

• When parenthetic information is part of the main sentence, the sentence punctuation goes outside the parenthesis.

Example: Many viewers complain about the excessive praise of a particular American Idol judge (Paula Abdul).

• When the punctuation belongs to the parenthetical information itself, the punctuation goes inside the parenthesis.

Example: Singers are often criticized for being “pitchy.” (A pitchy singer typically gives a poor vocal performance.)

Dashes –

Purpose:

• Similar to the function of parentheses, except dashes emphasize information.
• Join a phrase to the end of a sentence to add an example, illustration, or contradiction.

Example: American Idol is hosted by the most humorous man on earth – Ryan Seacrest.

• Insert an idea into the middle of a sentence to add an example, illustration, or contradiction.
  • The idea must be enclosed by dashes and could be lifted out of the sentence without affecting its overall sense.

Example: Channel 19 – considered by many as the home of trashy television – airs American Idol on Tuesday nights.