

Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services

Punctuation and Capitalization in Lists

Below are examples that illustrate the punctuation guidelines for lists. They can be distinguished from one another by the following:

1. A complete introductory sentence
2. An incomplete introductory sentence

Example with a complete introductory sentence

When the list items are complete sentences, the following method can be used:

- The introductory sentence ends with a colon or a period, whichever is appropriate.
- Each list item begins with a capital letter.
- Each list item ends with a period.

There is an exception: If the items in the list are relatively short, simple phrases (not sentences), you don't need any ending punctuation. An example of this is the two-item list at the beginning of this writing tip.

Example with an incomplete introductory sentence

When each item of the list completes the introductory sentence,

- the introductory sentence may end with a comma, semicolon, em dash (—), or no punctuation at all, whichever is appropriate;
- the list items can begin with lowercase letters;
- all but the last item end with a comma or semicolon;
- the second-to-last item ends with *and*; and
- the last item ends with a period.

Taken from The New York Public Library *Writers Guide to Style and Usage*, © 1994.