Punctuation 101: Using parentheses and brackets

When you need to interpret or explain your main thought (or add some extra details), parentheses are a handy punctuation tool.

Parentheses set off nonessential material, meaning a sentence is clear without it. The marks also alert readers to asides or supplemental expressions. Parentheses emphasize content, even more so than commas do. But they indicate that the material isn't as far removed from the main idea as when you use dashes.

Items appropriate for inclusion in parentheses include dates, source material and clarifying information.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) said, "A loving heart is the truest wisdom."

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13, ESV).

Note above that when parentheses are used within a sentence, the ending punctuation should go outside the closing mark. A complete sentence can be contained within parentheses; in that case, the first letter of the sentence should be capitalized, and the ending punctuation should be inside the closing mark.

The open house is on April 17. (See page 3 for more information.)

Parentheses can also be used alone (or together) for numbered or lettered items in a list.

We set these goals: (1) research new service times, (2) send out a survey and (3) increase publicity.

The school needs donations of:
a) finger paint,
b) construction paper and
c) glue.

Brackets add more information inside parenthetical material, often in scholarly work. In conversational writing, avoid using too many parenthetical phrases — especially within other ones.

The Bible study group will resume next week (covering the fruit of the Spirit [Galatians 5:22-23]).

Brackets can also indicate that you've changed a direct quote slightly, in order to clarify the meaning.

"We're on track to meet our [quarterly] budget," the district president said. N

OOPS!

From a worship bulletin:

Old Testament Reading

But my moth would encourage you (Job 16:5).

Hymn of the Day

These are interesting words to come out of someone's *mouth*.

Send your own bloopers to service@NewsletterNewsletter.com.

Design small-group logos for the church

Use new images from this month to create logos for your church's small groups. The easiest method is to find an image and add the group's name with the online Caption Editor. If possible, incorporate the church name, as well as a slogan, if the group has one.

Use the logo on all group-related material (print and web) so people can instantly recognize relevant news. N

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