

TIP Sheet

THE EXCLAMATION POINT

An exclamation point is used after a word group or sentence in order to emphasize a point or to express strong emotion or surprise. Use of the exclamation point is optional for the writer. It is one of the few ways that a writer can indicate how words may sound when spoken.

1. Use an exclamation point for emphasis.

That box contains personal items. Do not open it!

2. Use an exclamation point to indicate strong emotion or surprise.

What a shock!

Margaret opened the front door just as everyone shouted, "Surprise!"

3. In informal writing, multiple exclamation points are sometimes used to indicate stronger emphasis or emotion. However, in formal writing only one is necessary.

I can hardly wait!!! (Informal use only)

4. Do not overuse exclamation points or the intended effect may be lost.

- Overuse of the exclamation point:

Yesterday the boys were playing outside! They weren't paying much attention to their surroundings! As they played, I watched them from the kitchen window! I was horrified to see a mountain lion in the tree!

- More effective use of the exclamation point:

Yesterday the boys were playing outside. They weren't paying much attention to their surroundings. As they played, I watched them from the kitchen window. I was horrified to see a mountain lion in the tree!