An Introduction to Punctuation

An English teacher wrote these words on the board:

a woman without her man is nothing

and directed the students to punctuate it correctly.

The men wrote:

"A woman, without her man, is nothing."

The women wrote:

"A woman; without her, man is nothing."

PUNCTUATION IS IMPORTANT!!!

The punctuation marks are:-

- full stop (in the USA, it is called a *period*)

, comma

: colon

; semicolon

? question mark

! exclamation mark

/ slash, or oblique

... ellipse

“_ _ _ _” quotation marks

( _ _ _ _ ) brackets or parentheses

- dash or em-dash

car-park hyphen

Punctuation written with a capital ‘P’

PUNCTUATION written in upper case

punctuation written in lower case
Some Simple Rules

A full stop or period shows the end of a sentence. It is also used after initials and abbreviations:
• Peter Pan was written by J. M. Barrie.

A comma separates parts of a sentence, or words in a list, or shows additional information:
• Peter, who is eighteen, loves swimming, tennis, and football. He lives in London, the English capital.

An apostrophe replaces a missing letter or letters in contracted forms:
• I'd (= I had, or I would), isn’t (= is not).
• We also use apostrophes before or after the possessive with ‘s’: Phuong’s party.

A colon tells the reader that something is coming next, for example a list:
• People go to the cinema for many reasons: to meet friends, to be entertained, or to be educated.

A semi-colon is used to divide two parts of a sentence:
• She looked up and frowned; the boy ran away.

A capital letter is used at the start of each new sentence. You also use capitals for proper nouns, names of people and places, titles of films and books, etc.:
• Viet and Phuong saw ‘Atonement’ at the Megastar, Vincom Towers, when they were in Hanoi.

A question mark is used at the end of a direct question:
• ‘Can you drive?’ he asked.

An exclamation mark is used at the end of a sentence to show surprise, joy, anger, or shock:
• ‘Don’t speak to me like that!’ she shouted.
• ‘What a lovely present!’ he said.
• ‘Ow! That hurt!’ she cried.

A slash or oblique is used to show two alternatives, and also in web addresses.
• He/she should be a good communicator.
• http://www.bbclearningenglish.com

An ellipse is used either to show that some text is missing from a quote, or to provide tension in reported speech.
• The Colosseum . . . is in Rome.
• He looked up, and . . . there was a strange man at the door!

Quotation marks, (speech marks, or inverted commas) are used to show words that are spoken:
• The teacher described his behaviour as ‘infantile’.
  Speech marks go outside the words spoken by the speaker. The spoken words are divided from the reporting verb by a comma, and a full stop comes at the end.
• ‘I’m scared,’ said Michael.
• Michael said, ‘I’m scared.’

Brackets or parentheses are used when the writer adds information, an explanation, a comment etc. to something in the text. The text would still make sense if the information in brackets was removed:
• Queen Mary 2 (the largest ocean liner in the world) entered Sydney Harbour today.

A dash or em-dash is used when an additional comment or information is added to a sentence:
• Peter is usually - but not always - late for school.

A hyphen is used in many cases where two words have been joined together to form one word
• car-park swimming-pool kind-hearted
It is also used to separate long words that will not fit on one line.

Correct and clear punctuation is especially important in the IELTS exam!