

Brackets

APSU Writing Center Handout

Square Brackets []

Square brackets are a pair of marks [] used to enclose words or figures in order to separate them from the surrounding text.

Parentheses vs. Brackets

Parentheses () – Enclose additional information in your own writing.

Brackets [] – Insert comments or changes into someone else's words that you are quoting, or into material already inside parentheses.

How to Use Square Brackets []

1. To Show You Have Inserted Words Into a Quotation

Use brackets to clarify who or what a pronoun refers to.

- **Example:** Dr. Johnston said, "He [Jeremy] finished the research paper last month."

2. To Insert Information Within Parentheses

If material inside parentheses needs further clarification, use brackets inside the parentheses.

- **Example:** While cleaning my closet, I found clothes I no longer wear (including hats, pants, dresses [formal], and shoes).

3. To Insert Stage Directions in a Play

Brackets are commonly used for stage directions.

- **Example:** [King Leer enters]
- **Example:** [Raoul places a rose at Christine's grave]

4. To Indicate an Error in the Original Quotation (Using sic)

The word sic (Latin for “thus” or “so”) is placed in brackets after an error in the original text to show that the mistake appears in the source and was not made by you.

- **Example:** Don't you think that every one [sic] should attend the meeting? (everyone)

In-Text Citations and Brackets

1. IEEE Style

In IEEE style, sources are identified using numbers in square brackets that correspond to full citations in the reference list.

Use the same number each time you cite the same source.

Place the citation number inside brackets: [2]

When citing multiple sources, separate them with commas or use a dash for a range:

- **Example:** [2], [6], [7]
- **Example:** [2]–[3]

2. APA Style

Brackets are sometimes used in APA style to describe the format of a podcast.

- **Example:** [Audio podcast] and [Video podcast]
- **Example:** [Audio podcast episode] and [Video podcast episode]

Citation Example: Meraji, S. M., & Demby, G. (Hosts). (2016–present). Code switch [Audio podcast]. National Public Radio. <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/510312/codeswitch>

Angle Brackets < >

Angle brackets are a pair of marks in the form < > used to enclose words or figures to separate them from surrounding text.

They commonly appear in mathematical equations, computer programming, and technical writing.

They can be used to indicate foreign speech in comic strips, books, or graphic novels

- Traveler: I am here to help you.
- Tourist #1: <<What is she saying?>>
- Tourist #2: <<I don't know. Perhaps she needs directions?>>

Braces { }

Braces are used to group items or show relationships among lines, symbols, or formulas in mathematical, statistical, or chemical expressions.

Braces are commonly used in mathematics, logic, computer programming and linguistics.

- Equal choices: {red, blue, green}
- Numbers: $E = \{3, 6, 9, 12, 15\}$
- Music notation: [{c, e, g} {e, g, c2} {g, c2, e2}]

In the music example, there are three sets of notes. Each set is grouped with braces, and the entire collection of sets is enclosed in square brackets to hold them together as one larger grouping.

References

APA Style (2020, October). *Podcast References*. American Psychological Association.

<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples/podcast-references>

Macdissi, K. (2023). *Brackets and Braces and Parentheses – Oh My! (How & When to Use)*.

Writing Center Underground.

<https://writingcenterunderground.wordpress.com/2015/04/22/brackets-and-braces-and-parenthesis-oh-my/>

Mcleod, D. (2022). *Angle Bracket Symbol*. Grammarist.

<https://grammarist.com/punctuation/angle-bracket-symbol/>

MLA Style Center. (2017, August 7). *How do I quote stage directions?* Modern Language

Association of America. <https://style.mla.org/quoting-stage-directions/>

Mitteager, C. (2008). *Brackets vs. Parentheses*. The College of Saint Rose Writing Center.

<https://www.strose.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Brackets-Handout-Cynthia2.pdf>.

Naval Postgraduate School Graduate Writing Center (2023). *Parentheses and Brackets*. Naval

Postgraduate School. <https://nps.edu/web/gwc/parentheses-and-brackets>

References

Swarthmore Writing Center. (2023). *Dashes, Parentheses, Brackets, Ellipses*. Swarthmore Writing Center. <https://www.swarthmore.edu/writing/dashes-parentheses-brackets-ellipses-0>

The University of Arizona Writing Center. (2022). *Brackets & Braces*. The University of Arizona Writing Center. <https://writingcenter.uagc.edu/brackets-braces>.