“SIC” RULES

Rules from AP Stylebook, Bad Grammar/Good Punctuation,
Chicago Manual of Style, Gregg Reference Manual, Morson’s, and Grammar Girl

AP STYLEBOOK

(sic) Do not use (sic) unless it is in the matter being quoted. To show that an error, peculiar usage or spelling is in the original, use a note to editors at the top of the story, below the summary line but ahead of a byline.

Eds. note: [ Eds: The spelling cabob is in the original document. ]
or
Eds. note: [ Eds: The spelling Jorga is correct. ]

(NOTE FROM MARLA: AP Stylebook is the only style manual to suggest parentheses instead of brackets.)

CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE (16TH EDITION)

13.59 “Sic”

Literally meaning “so,” “thus,” “in this manner,” and traditionally set in italics, sic may be inserted in brackets following a word misspelled or wrongly used in the original. This device should be used only where it is relevant to call attention to such matters (and especially where readers might otherwise assume the mistake is in the transcription rather than the original) or where paraphrase or silent correction is inappropriate (see 13.4, 13.7 (item 5)).

In September 1862, J. W. Chaffin, president of the Miami Conference of Wesleyan Methodist Connection, urged Lincoln that “the confiscation law past [sic] at the last session of Congress should be faithfully executed” and that “to neglect this national righteousness” would prove “disastrous to the American people.”

Sic should not be used merely to call attention to unconventional spellings, which should be explained (if at all) in a note or in prefatory material. Similarly, where material with many errors and variant spellings (such as a collection of informal letters) is reproduced as written, a prefatory comment or a note to that effect will make a succession of sics unnecessary.

13.7 Permissible changes to punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Although in a direct quotation the wording should be reproduced exactly, the following changes are generally permissible to make a passage fit into the syntax and typography of the surrounding text. See also 13.8.
1. Single quotation marks may be changed to double, and double to single (see 13.28); punctuation relative to quotation marks should be adjusted accordingly (see 6.9). Guillemets and other types of quotation marks in a foreign language may be changed to regular single or double quotation marks (see 13.71).

2. The initial letter may be changed to a capital or a lowercase letter (see 13.13–16).

3. A final period may be omitted or changed to a comma as required, and punctuation may be omitted where ellipsis points are used (see 13.48–56).

4. Original note reference marks (and the notes to which they refer) may be omitted unless omission would affect the meaning of the quotation. If an original note is included, the quotation may best be set off as a block quotation (see 13.9), with the note in smaller type at the end, or the note may be summarized in the accompanying text. Authors may, on the other hand, add note references of their own within quotations.

5. Obvious typographic errors may be corrected silently (without comment or sic; see 13.59), unless the passage quoted is from an older work or a manuscript source where idiosyncrasies of spelling are generally preserved. If spelling and punctuation are modernized or altered for clarity, readers must be so informed in a note, in a preface, or elsewhere.

6. In quoting from early printed documents, the archaic Latin /uni0283 (small letter esh, Unicode character U+0283, similar to the integral sign), used to represent a lowercase s at the beginning or in the middle but never at the end of a word (“Such goodnes of your juflice, that our joul . . .”), may be changed to a modern s. Similarly, Vanitie and Vncertaintie (a quoted title) may be changed to Vanitie and Uncertaintie, but writers or editors without a strong background in classical or Renaissance studies should generally be wary of changing u to v, i to j, or vice versa. See also 11.61, 11.142–43.

13.8 Permissible changes to typography and layout

The following elements of typography and layout may be changed to assimilate a quotation to the surrounding text:

1. The typeface or font should be changed to agree with the surrounding text.

2. Words in full capitals in the original may be set in small caps, if that is the preferred style for the surrounding text. (See also 10.8.)

3. In dialogue, names of speakers may be moved from a centered position to flush left.

4. Underlined words in a quoted manuscript may be printed as italics, unless the underlining itself is considered integral to the source or otherwise worthy of reproducing.

5. In quoting correspondence, such matters as paragraph indentation and the position of the salutation and signature may be adjusted.

For paragraph indentation in block quotations, see 13.20. For reproducing poetry extracts, see 13.23–27. For permissible changes to titles of books, articles, poems, and other works, see 8.163.
8.163 Permissible changes to titles

When a title is referred to in text or notes or listed in a bibliography or reference list, its original spelling (including non-Latin letters such as π or γ) and hyphenation should be preserved, regardless of the style used in the surrounding text. Capitalization may be changed to headline style (8.157) or sentence style (8.156), as applicable. As a matter of editorial discretion, an ampersand (&) may be changed to and, or, more rarely, a numeral may be spelled out (see 14.96). On title pages, commas are sometimes omitted from the ends of lines for aesthetic reasons. When such a title is referred to, such commas should be added, including any comma omitted before a date that appears on a line by itself at the end of a title or subtitle. (Serial commas need be added only if it is clear that they are used in the work itself; see 6.18.) If title and subtitle on a title page are distinguished by typeface alone, a colon must be added when referring to the full title. A dash in the original should be retained; however, a semicolon between title and subtitle may usually be changed to a colon. (For two subtitles in the original, see 14.98. For older titles, see 14.106.) The following examples illustrate the way titles and subtitles are normally punctuated and capitalized in running text, notes, and bibliographies using headline capitalization. The first three are books, the fourth an article.

Disease, Pain, and Sacrifice: Toward a Psychology of Suffering
Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800–1850
Browning’s Roman Murder Story: A Reading of “The Ring and the Book”
“Milton Friedman’s Capitalism and Freedom—a Best-Seller for Chicago”

For titles within titles (as in the third and fourth examples above), see 8.171, 8.175.

BAG GRAMMAR/GOOD PUNCTUATION

THE WORD SIC.1: Use the word sic in brackets after an element where the word or words are blatantly and/or factually incorrect.

We sent it on Friday, June 31 [sic].
We traveled that weekend to the capital of Kentucky, Louisville [sic].
The first moon landing in 1979 [sic] supported our program.

Most often the word sic is used inside of quoted material to denote an error in the original. Since you, the reporter, are the editor of the transcript, you are using sic to show that the error is not yours.

“(As I arrived at the seen) [sic], there was total chaos.”

“The insurance company liability [sic] is obvious.”

“The patient was given Lipator [sic] for cholesterol issues.”

In addition to using sic to show an error in quoted material, it is also used to point out an obvious error in the transcript. Inserting the word sic for an error is self-protection for you. It indicates your
recognition of the error. A transcript littered with the word sic, however, does not read well. Pick and choose the occasions that you are going to use it. It should be used sparingly and not be overused or used when there is another remedy available.

THE WORD SIC.2: Do not use the word sic for a slight mispronunciation or for words that are made up.

It caused a nuclear disaster. (though he said nucular)
It caused both of us to shudder. (though he said bof)
There was a slight “crink” in my leg muscle.

When there is a simple mispronunciation, it is best to simply transcribe the correct word. When a word is made up, it is best to use a pair of quotes to signal the “unusual” word.

THE WORD SIC.3: Do not use the word sic when the error is immediately corrected.

A  It is spelled V-a-l-i-u-m.
MR. NELSON: No. It is V-a-l-i-u-m.
THE WITNESS: Thank you.

Q  How long did you live in Illinois? Danville, was it?
A  It was Danville, Indiana, not Illinois.

When the error is immediately corrected, there is no need to do anything as the correction is obvious. If the correction comes on later pages, sic is appropriately used to show the error.

Some reporters use the word verbatim in brackets to show an error on the part of the speaker. This is perhaps less harsh than sic – a reporter in a seminar referred to it as a “kinder, gentler sic” – and can be used to note a speaker error rather than a factual error. We might also use it for an obvious grammar error for someone whose grammar is otherwise quite good or for a mispronounced word or a wrong word – neither of which you are going to change – when it would otherwise look like a reporter error.

I cannot say that I like them [verbatim] boys. (when the person’s grammar is otherwise quite good)
We spoke with Mr. Woodlawn [verbatim] on several occasions. (when the name is actually Woodland)
They fired him on the 17th [verbatim] of April. (when 19th is said every other time it comes up)

Certainly, the use of verbatim in brackets is a judgment call by the reporter, and we probably do not all agree on when and where to use it.
Rule 282 - When the original wording contains a misspelling, a grammatical error, or a confusing expression of thought, insert the term sic (meaning “so” or “this is the way it was”) in brackets to indicate that the error existed in the original material.

As he wrote in his letter, “I would sooner go to jail then [sic] have to pay your bill.” (The word sic is not underscored in typed material.)

MORSON’S

The Latin word sic means “thus, so in that manner,” and writers traditionally use it to show that an original manuscript or document that is being quoted contains an error in spelling or grammar or fact. In effect, the person who reproduces the quoted passage is saying, I found this error as you see it. I did not create it. I am only rewriting what someone else wrote.”

In the following examples, notice that [sic] is placed immediately after the error and it has brackets around it (or parentheses if the keyboard has no brackets). Notice also that the word is not capitalized, that no period follows it unless it is the last word in the sentence, and that italics, if available, are used.

EXAMPLES

a. Q Were the directions written?
   A This is the note he shoved at me. It says, “Drop the package on the corner of Popular [sic] Street.”

b. Q Will you read the underlined portion of the bank’s letter?
   A It says, “You will be persecuted [sic] for fraud and embezzlement if you do not respond in person to explain what happened to those checks.”

c. Q Did you sign the contract?
   A I signed the contract, and you can see that it says, “shall have access to the bridle [sic] suite for three days and two nights, beginning,” which is why I wrote the next letter to make sure they were not horsing around with my reservations.

The court reporter is placed in a precarious and dangerous position regarding the use of [sic]. The original purpose was to use [sic] for the reproduction of written material. A writer would see the error and rewrite the passage as is, noting the error. However, when the documents are read aloud in court and, therefore, quoted, the reporter writes what is heard and is unlikely to know if principle has been misspelled as principal in the document. Consequently, great reluctance and great caution should be exercised before using [sic], because one must be absolutely sure, first, that there is an error; second,
that the record will not take care of the error itself by the context around it; and third, that the person committing the error is not an immediate superior who will be outraged to see the errors highlighted.

As an illustration in the last instance, if the judge has spoken if President Lincoln as the fifteenth President of the United States and the point is of no legal consequence, the court reporter should not use [sic].

If a witness uses the date 1998 instead of 1996 and it is of legal consequence, the court reporter should confer with the judge before using [sic].

If a witness continues to talk about a person and misidentifies the person often, it is the duty of the lawyers to correct the error. If the lawyer does not, let the error speak for itself and do not use [sic].

EXAMPLE

d. Q Did you know Mrs. Robertson?
   A Mistress Robinson was my neighbor.
   Q How long was Mrs. Robertson your neighbor?
   A Mistress Robinson was my neighbor for over 25 years.

If the witness uses the wrong word or number, it is the duty of the lawyer to correct the error. If the lawyer does not, let the record speak for itself.

EXAMPLE

e. Q Where did you go to school?
   A Robert-Welsh School.
   Q Do you mean the Roberts-Walsh Business School?
   A That’s right.

When long passage from previous testimony or other documents are read into the record, the likelihood of misreading increases considerably. A reporter who gets to compare the original with his or her notes and sees the misreadings may feel that using [sic] will overwhelm the record. A better way to handle the misreadings is to use the parenthetical (as read) to introduce the reading. This certifies the reading without creating problems for the reporter by calling attention to all of the discrepancies. Do not use [sic] with (as read).

In the following examples, assume that the speaker misreads one and the same, misrepresentation, Williams, and extracted. Also assume that the speaker omits reading the words directly and law.

Example f is a cluttered and poor record. Example g is a clear and accurate record.

EXAMPLES

f. Let me read from page 32: “The act of gathering, loading, and storing was one in [sic] the same continuous act, although the original representation [sic] was calculated to mislead. Mr. William [sic] admitted that he abstracted [sic] articles [sic] from the storage building, but there were some questions of the common rule.”

g. Let me read from page 32 (as read): “The act of gathering, loading, and storing was one in the same continuous act, although the original representation was calculated to mislead. Mr. William admitted that he abstracted articles from the storage building, but there were some questions of the common rule.”

In summary, the court reporter will rarely use [sic] because it’s too likely to appear that the court reporter is judging what is of legal consequence (there is a system of appeal for that) and what is an error or misspoken word (there are lawyers for that).

P.S. Are you curious about another sic word? Of course, you are. That’s the verb that means “to urge to attack or to chase.”

EXAMPLE

h. Q Did your neighbor raise sheep?
   A Yes. They were vicious sheep.
   Q Why do you say that?
   A Whenever I walked around the fence, I could hear him tell them, “Sic him.”
   Q He sicced his sheep on you?
   A Yes and I was sick of his siccing those sheep on me. I told my wife, “If he sics those sheep on me once more, there’s going to be a dead ewe. I said ‘you,’ and that’s why she took out a warrant for my arrest.”

THE COURT: Case dismissed. Sic transit Gloria mundi. (See entry on page 166.

GRAMMAR GIRL

Parentheses, Brackets, and Braces

Episode 233: July 29, 2010

Today guest-writer Bonnie Trenga will help us talk about three punctuation marks: one you undoubtedly know how to use, another you possibly misuse, and yet another you’ve likely never used. If you’ve ever wondered when to favor parentheses over square brackets and when to stick in a pair of curly braces, listen on.

Parentheses

You’re probably well versed in how to use those sideways eyebrow thingies, better known as parentheses. First, remember that a pair of them is called “parentheses,” whereas a single one is a “parenthesis.” You may want to review episode 222 in which we
compared parentheses to dashes and commas. For now, let’s just say that parentheses mainly enclose information that is not vital to a sentence. No matter what you put within parentheses, your sentence must still make sense if you delete them and everything inside. Note that you are allowed to put both partial sentences and complete sentences within parentheses. But no more than a whole paragraph, please, requests authority Brian Garner (1).

Before we move on, we need to address one issue: how to use terminal punctuation marks with parentheses. If your sentence starts with an opening parenthesis, then what’s inside your parentheses is a complete sentence. You must therefore ensure that the terminal punctuation mark, such as a period, question mark, or exclamation point, goes inside the closing parenthesis: “(I knew he wouldn't want to do that.)”. If what’s within the parentheses is only a partial sentence, put the terminal punctuation outside instead: “I moved to America when I was 10 (in 1980).”

For the most part, these two rules seem fairly easy to understand—complete sentence: terminal punctuation inside; partial sentence: terminal punctuation outside. However, when you have a sentence that contains another complete sentence within parentheses, the punctuation could become confusing. Let’s say you want to add the complete sentence “I can’t believe it!” inside parentheses within another complete sentence. In this case, the exclamation point would go inside the closing parenthesis and then a period would go outside: “I ate the whole box of donuts (I can’t believe it!).”

That works, but I often recommend making the sentence inside parentheses a complete sentence on its own that follows the first sentence. Make sure you have a reason for putting it in parentheses.

Square Brackets

Now it’s time to introduce our potentially misused friends: square brackets. Brackets, which are one long line short of a standing-up rectangle, appear on the keyboard to the right of the letter “p.” They seem less common than their parenthetical cousins, though you do sometimes see both punctuation marks within the same sentence. Use brackets in sentences where you want to put parentheses within parentheses. Since two parentheses in a row would be confusing, you bookend your parentheses with brackets. So, the order is opening parenthesis, opening bracket, closing bracket, closing parenthesis. For example, you would write “They are getting married (they love each other [of course!]).”

According to Garner, square brackets also come in handy for subsequent authors and editors who want to “enclose comments, corrections, explanations, interpolations, notes, or translations that were not in the original text” (2).

If you are in a scholarly field, you may find yourself writing a paper and quoting an expert, and perhaps you discover you need to clarify what the expert said. Bill Walsh in Lapsing into a Comma (3) warns, “Bracketed material should clarify language, not replace it….” You shouldn’t alter what the original writer wrote, so use brackets around your clarification. For example, if the original quotation reads, “This enterprising paleontologist discovered a new species of plant eater,” you shouldn’t change it to “[Bob Jones] discovered a new species of plant eater.” You’d have to quote the material this way: “This enterprising paleontologist [Bob Jones] discovered a new species of plant eater.” (Note also that you wouldn’t be allowed to use parentheses around the name you add, because it would seem—incorrectly—like an aside that appeared in the original text.)

Remember, though, that brackets differ from the three dots called an ellipsis, which you use when you are deleting extraneous words from a direct quotation. If you want to learn more about an ellipsis, see the recent Grammar Girl episode on ellipses.

Sometimes you might decide to start a sentence by quoting someone, but the quotation does not include a capital letter. If your work is informal or not overly formal, it is acceptable to just change the lowercase letter to a capital one. On the other hand, scholars who must be “rigorously accurate” (4) are required to use a set of brackets around the capital letter they are changing. For example, if the quoted word is “it,” with a lowercase “i,” and a rigorously accurate scholar wants the word “it” to start a sentence, she would have to write bracket-uppercase I-bracket-lowercase t: “[I].”

The last place you are likely to encounter square brackets is around the Latin word “sic,” which means “thus.” You use it—in italics—when you’re quoting someone who has made an error, such as a misstatement of fact or a spelling mistake. You should use bracket-sic-bracket only when you need to aid readers (5); you don’t want to show off or seem pedantic by constantly pointing out others’ failings. Admittedly, though, we grammar types understand this urge to correct others.

Braces
Our last foray into punctuation marks leads us to what are known as curly braces. To type one, press the shift key as you punch the bracket key, to the right of the letter “p.” I must say I have never used curly braces. In fact, although they look like punctuation marks, they really aren’t (6), at least not in the way you can type them yourself.

They’re on your keyboard because they have specialized uses in mathematics and science. For example, they are used to enclose the third level of nested equations when parentheses and brackets have already been used for the first two levels (7).

Big curly braces that span multiple lines are sometimes used to enclose groups of words that belong together (8) or triplet lines in poetry, but your keyboard doesn’t have those big curly braces that span multiple lines.

**Summary**

Today you’ve learned how to use various curved, square, and curly squiggles within your sentences. Be sure to keep them straight!