

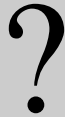
Question mark

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Jump to: [navigation](#), [search](#)

"?" redirects here. For the backwards or mirrored question mark used to indicate irony or sarcasm, see [percontation point](#). For other uses, see [? \(disambiguation\)](#).

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Question mark

Punctuation

[apostrophe](#) (' ')

[brackets](#) ([], (), { }, < >)

[colon](#) (:)

[comma](#) (, ‘ ’)

[dash](#) (−, −, —, —)

[ellipsis](#) (…, …, …)

[exclamation mark](#) (!)

[full stop / period](#) (.)

[hyphen](#) (-)

[hyphen-minus](#) (-)

question mark (?)

[quotation marks](#) (‘ ’, “ ”, ' ', " ")

[semicolon](#) (;)

[slash / stroke / solidus](#) (/, /)

Word dividers

[interpunct](#) (·)

[space](#) () () ()

General typography

[ampersand](#) (&)

[asterisk](#) (*)

[at sign](#) (@)

[backslash](#) (\)

[bullet](#) (•)

<u>caret</u>	(^)
<u>dagger</u>	(†, ‡)
<u>degree</u>	(°)
<u>ditto mark</u>	(")
<u>inverted exclamation mark</u>	(¡)
<u>inverted question mark</u>	(¿)
<u>number sign / pound / hash / octothorpe</u>	(#)
<u>numero sign</u>	(№)
<u>obelus</u>	(÷)
<u>ordinal indicator</u>	(°, ^a)
<u>percent, per mil</u>	(‰, ‰ ₀₀)
<u>plus and minus</u>	(+ -)
<u>basis point</u>	(‰ ₀₀₀)
<u>pilcrow</u>	(¶)
<u>prime</u>	(′, ″, ‴)
<u>section sign</u>	(§)
<u>tilde</u>	(~)
<u>underscore / understrike</u>	(_)
<u>vertical bar / broken bar / pipe</u>	(,)

Intellectual property

<u>copyright symbol</u>	(©)
<u>registered trademark</u>	(®)
<u>service mark</u>	(™)
<u>sound recording copyright</u>	(℗)
<u>trademark</u>	(℔)

Currency

<u>currency (generic)</u>	(₤)
<u>currency (specific)</u>	(<u>₱</u> <u>₲</u> <u>₳</u> <u>₴</u> <u>₵</u> <u>₶</u> <u>₷</u> <u>₸</u> <u>₹</u> <u>₺</u> <u>₻</u> <u>₼</u> <u>₽</u> <u>₾</u> <u>₿</u> <u>₠</u> <u>₡</u> <u>₢</u> <u>₣</u> <u>₤</u> <u>₥</u> <u>₦</u> <u>₧</u> <u>₨</u> <u>₩</u> <u>₪</u> <u>₫</u> <u>€</u> <u>₭</u> <u>₮</u> <u>₯</u> <u>₰</u> <u>₱</u> <u>₲</u> <u>₳</u> <u>₴</u> <u>₵</u> <u>₶</u> <u>₷</u> <u>₸</u> <u>₹</u> <u>₺</u> <u>₻</u> <u>₼</u> <u>₽</u> <u>₾</u> <u>₿</u>)

Uncommon typography

<u>asterism</u>	(*)
<u>hedera</u>	(☞)

index / fist	(☞)
interrobang	(?)
irony punctuation	(□)
lozenge	(◇)
reference mark	(⌘)
tie	(⌘)

Related

- [diacritical marks](#)
- [logic symbols](#)
- [whitespace characters](#)
- [non-English quotation style](#) (« », „ ”)

In other scripts

- [Chinese punctuation](#)
- [Hebrew punctuation](#)
- [Japanese punctuation](#)
- [Korean punctuation](#)

- [Book](#)
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The **question mark** (?; also known as an **interrogation point**, **interrogation mark**, **question point**, **query**, or **eroteme**),^[1] is a **punctuation mark** that replaces the **full stop** (period) at the end of an **interrogative sentence** in English and many other languages. The question mark is not used for **indirect questions**. The question mark character is also often used in place of missing or unknown data. In Unicode, it is encoded at U+003F ? QUESTION MARK (HTML: ?).

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History

Lynne Truss attributes an early form of the modern question mark in western language to [Alcuin of York](#).^[2] Truss describes the *punctus interrogativus* of the late 8th century as "a lightning flash, striking from right to left".^[3] (The punctuation system of [Aelius Donatus](#), current through the [Early Middle Ages](#), used only simple dots at various heights.)

This earliest question mark was a decoration of one of these dots, with the "lightning flash" perhaps meant to denote [intonation](#) (or a [tilde](#) or [titlo](#), named after the Latin word *titulus*, as in " ~ ", like those wavy and more or less slanted marks used in lots of medieval texts for denoting various things such as abbreviations, and that would become later various diacritics or ligatures or modified letters used in the Latin script), and perhaps associated with early musical notation like [neumes](#).^{[4][5]} Over the next three centuries this pitch-defining element (if it ever existed) seems to have been forgotten, so that the Alcuinesque stroke-over-dot sign (with the stroke sometimes slightly curved) is often seen indifferently at the end of clauses, whether they embody a question or not.

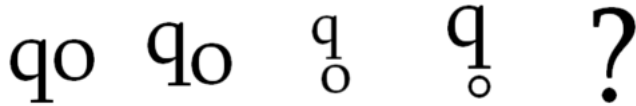
In the early 13th century, when the growth of communities of scholars ([universities](#)) in Paris and other major cities led to an expansion and streamlining of the book-production trade,^[6] punctuation was rationalised by assigning Alcuin's stroke-over-dot specifically to interrogatives; by this time the stroke was more sharply curved and can easily be recognised as the modern question-mark.

The symbol is also sometimes^[7] thought to originate from the [Latin](#) *quaestiō* (that is, QVAESTIO), meaning "question", which was abbreviated during the [Middle Ages](#) to *qo*. The lowercase *q* was written above the lowercase *o*, and this mark was transformed into the modern symbol. However, evidence of the actual use of the Q-over-o notation in medieval manuscripts is lacking; if anything, medieval forms of the upper component seem to be evolving towards the q-shape rather than away from it.

quaestio quaestio qo 



One possible origin of the question mark from Latin.



A diagram showing the possible evolution of the question mark from Latin.

According to a 2011 discovery by a Cambridge manuscript expert, [Syriac](#) was the first language to use a question mark. The Syriac question mark has the form of a vertical double dot.^[8]

In other languages and scripts

Opening and closing question marks



Opening and closing question marks

In some languages, such as [Spanish](#), typography since the 18th century has required opening and closing question marks,^[9] as in "¿Qué hora es?" (What time is it?); an interrogative sentence or phrase begins with an [inverted question mark](#) (¿) and ends with the question mark (?).^[10] The omission of this [orthographical](#) rule is quite common in informal writing, but is always considered a mistake.

Armenian, Greek question mark



Question mark in Armenian

In [Armenian](#) the question mark (◌[◌]) takes the form of an open circle and is placed over the last vowel of the question word. It is defined in [Unicode](#) at U+055E ◌[◌] ARMENIAN QUESTION MARK.

In [Greek](#) and [Church Slavonic](#), the question mark is a [semicolon](#). The regular Latin semicolon can be used U+003B ; SEMICOLON. Although it exists a separate character U+037E ; GREEK QUESTION MARK, the regular semicolon is well used.

Mirrored question mark

Not to be confused with [Irony punctuation](#).



Mirrored question mark in Arabic and Persian

In [Arabic](#) and languages that use Arabic script such as [Persian](#) and [Urdu](#), which are written from right to left, the question mark ؟ is mirrored right-to-left from the English question mark. (Some browsers may display the character in the previous sentence as a forward question mark due to font or text directionality issues). [Hebrew](#) is also written right-to-left, but it uses a question mark that appears on the page in the same orientation as the Roman-alphabet question mark.^[11]

In Unicode, two encodings are available: U+061F ؟ ARABIC QUESTION MARK (HTML: `؟`; With [Bidi](#) code AL: Right-to-Left Arabic) and U+2E2E ❏ REVERSED QUESTION MARK (HTML: `⸮`; With bi-directional code Other Neutrals).

Fullwidth question mark

The question mark is also used in modern writing in [Chinese](#), and [Japanese](#), although it is not strictly necessary in either. Usually it is written as [fullwidth form](#) in Chinese and Japanese, in Unicode: U+FF1F ？ FULLWIDTH QUESTION MARK.

In other scripts

Some other scripts have a specific question mark:

- U+1367 ፤ ETHIOPIC QUESTION MARK
- U+A60F ႦႨ VAI QUESTION MARK
- U+2CFA ❏ COPTIC OLD NUBIAN DIRECT QUESTION MARK and U+2CFB ❏ COPTIC OLD NUBIAN INDIRECT QUESTION MARK

Stylistic variants

French usage must include a [space](#) before the question mark (for example, "Que voulez-vous boire ?"),^[12] whereas in the English language orthography no space is allowed in front of the question mark (e.g. "What do you drink?"), see also: [Plenken](#).

In typography, some stylistic variants and combinations are available:

- U+2047 ?? DOUBLE QUESTION MARK
- U+FE56 ? SMALL QUESTION MARK
- U+2048 ?! QUESTION EXCLAMATION MARK
- U+2049 !? EXCLAMATION QUESTION MARK
- U+203D ? [INTERROBANG](#)

Rhetorical question mark

Main article: [Irony mark](#)

The **rhetorical question mark** or percontation point was invented by [Henry Denham](#) in the 1580s and was used at the end of a [rhetorical question](#); however, its use died out in the 17th century. It was the reverse of an ordinary question mark, so that instead of the main opening pointing back into the sentence, it opened away from it.^[13] This character can be represented using the reversed question mark (◌?) found in Unicode as U+2E2E. The percontation point is analogous to the [Irony mark](#), but these are very rarely seen.

Rhetorical questions in some (informal) situations can use a bracketed question mark, e.g. "*Oh, really(?)*", for example in [888 subtitles](#).^[14]

The question mark can also be used as a [meta](#)-sign to signal uncertainty regarding what precedes. It is usually put between brackets (?). The uncertainty may concern either a superficial (such as unsure spelling) or a deeper [truth](#) (real [meaning](#)) level.


Computing

In [computing](#), the question mark [character](#) is represented by [ASCII](#) code 63 (0x3F hexadecimal), and is located at [Unicode code-point](#) U+003F. The full-width (double-byte) equivalent, ? , is located at Unicode code point U+FF1F.

The question mark is often utilized as a [wildcard character](#): a symbol that can be used to substitute for any other character or characters in a [string](#). In particular "?" is used as a substitute for any one character as opposed to the [asterisk](#), "*", which can be used as a substitute for zero or more characters in a string. The [inverted question mark](#) (¿) corresponds to Unicode code-point 191 (U+00BF), and can be accessed from the keyboard in [Microsoft Windows](#) on the default US layout by holding down the [Alt key](#) and typing either 1 6 8 (ANSI) or 0 1 9 1 (Unicode) on the numeric keypad. In [GNOME](#) applications, it can be entered by typing the hexadecimal Unicode character while holding down both ctrl and shift, i.e.: ctrl+shift+BF. In recent [XFree86](#) and [X.Org](#) incarnations of the [X Window System](#), it can be accessed as a compose sequence of two straight question marks, i.e. pressing <Compose> ? ? yields ¿. In the [Mac OS](#), option+shift+? produces an inverted question mark.

The question mark is used in ASCII renderings of the [International Phonetic Alphabet](#), such as [SAMPA](#) in place of the [glottal stop](#) symbol, ʔ, (which resembles "?" without the dot), and corresponds to Unicode code point U+0294, *Latin letter glottal stop*.

In [computer programming](#), the symbol "?" has a special meaning in many [programming languages](#). In C-descended languages, "?" is part of the [?:](#) operator, which is used to evaluate simple [boolean conditions](#). In C# 2.0, the "?" modifier is used to handle [nullable data types](#) and "??" is the [null coalescing operator](#). In the [POSIX](#) syntax for [regular expressions](#), such as the one used in [Perl](#) and [Python](#), ? stands for "zero or one instance of the previous subexpression", i.e. an optional element. In certain implementations of the [BASIC](#) programming language, the "?" character may be used as a shorthand for the "print" function; in others (notably the [BBC BASIC](#) family), "?" is used to address a single-byte memory location. In [OCaml](#), the question mark precedes the label for an optional parameter. In [Scheme](#), as a convention, symbol names ending in ? are used for predicates such as odd?, null?, and eq?. Similarly, in [Ruby](#), method names ending in ? are used for predicates.

In many [web browsers](#) and other computer programs, "?" is used to show a [character](#) not found in the program's [character set](#). This commonly occurs for apostrophes and quotation marks when they are written with software that uses its own proprietary non-standard code for these characters, such as Microsoft's [Smart Quotes](#). Some fonts will instead use the Unicode [Replacement Glyph](#) (U+FFFD, ) , which is commonly rendered as a white question mark in a black diamond (see [replacement character](#)).

The generic [URL](#) syntax allows for a [query string](#) to be appended to a resource location in a web address so that additional information can be passed to a script; the query mark, ?, is used to indicate the start of a query string. A query string is usually made up of a number of different field/value pairs, each separated by the [ampersand](#) symbol, &, as seen in this URL:

```
http://www.example.com/login.php?username=test&password=blank
```

Here, a script on the page *login.php* on the server [www.example.com](#) is to provide a response to the query string containing the pairs "username"-"test" and "password"-"blank".

Games

In [algebraic chess notation](#), "?" denotes a bad move, and "??" a [blunder](#), "?!" a [dubious](#) move and "!?" an interesting move. For details of all of the chess punctuation see [punctuation \(chess\)](#).

In [Scrabble](#), a question mark indicates a blank tile.^[15]

Mathematics

In [mathematics](#), "?" commonly denotes [Minkowski's question mark function](#). In equations, it can mean "questioned" as opposed to "defined".

- U+225F $\stackrel{?}{=}$ QUESTIONED EQUAL TO
- U+2A7B $\stackrel{?}{<}$ LESS-THAN WITH QUESTION MARK ABOVE
- U+2A7C $\stackrel{?}{>}$ GREATER-THAN WITH QUESTION MARK ABOVE

Medicine

A question mark is used in English medical notes to suggest a possible [diagnosis](#). It facilitates the recording of a doctor's impressions regarding a patient's symptoms and signs. For example, for a patient presenting with left [lower abdominal pain](#), a differential diagnosis might include [?Diverticulitis](#) (read as 'Query Diverticulitis').

See also

- [Exclamation mark](#)
- [Interrobang](#)
- [Irony point](#)
- [Terminal punctuation](#)

Notes

1. [Jump up](#) [^] In journalism. See Truss, Lynne. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, 2003. p. 139. [ISBN 1-59240-087-6](#).
2. [Jump up](#) [^] Lynne Truss. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, 2003. p. 76. [ISBN 1-59240-087-6](#).
3. [Jump up](#) [^] [Typografie.info](#)
4. [Jump up](#) [^] M. B. Parkes, *Pause and effect: punctuation in the west*, [ISBN 0-520-07941-8](#).
5. [Jump up](#) [^] [The Straight Dope on the question mark](#) (link down)
6. [Jump up](#) [^] De Hamel, Christopher *History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, 1997
7. [Jump up](#) [^] Brewer, E. C. *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 1870 (rev. 1894), s.v. 'Punctuation'.
8. [Jump up](#) [^] ["Syriac double dot: World's earliest question mark"](#). *CBS News*. 22 July 2011. Retrieved 28 July 2011.
9. [Jump up](#) [^] Truss, Lynn (2004). *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. New York: Gotham Books. pp. 142–143. [ISBN 1-59240-087-6](#).
10. [Jump up](#) [^] [Upside Down Exclamation Point](#)
11. [Jump up](#) [^] Truss, Lynne. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, 2003. p. 143. [ISBN 1-59240-087-6](#).
12. [Jump up](#) [^] [Book typography, Ari Rafaeli, 2005](#)
13. [Jump up](#) [^] Truss, Lynne. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, 2003. p. 142. [ISBN 1-59240-087-6](#).
14. [Jump up](#) [^] The equivalent for an ironic or sarcastic statement would be a bracketed exclamation mark, e.g. "Oh, really(!)".
15. [Jump up](#) [^] ["Scrabble Glossary"](#). Tucson Scrabble Club. Retrieved 2012-02-06.

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- Lupton, Ellen and Miller, J. Abbott, "Period styles: a punctuated history", in *The Norton Reader* 11th edition, ed. Linda H. Peterson, Norton, 2003 [Online excerpt \(at least\)](#)
- Parkes, M.B., *Pause and Effect: an Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*, [University of California Press](#), 1993
- Truss, Lynne, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* Gotham Books, NY, p. 139

External links



Wikimedia Commons has media related to [Question mark](#).

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