When to use Brackets and Parentheses

Use brackets to enclose information, emphasize information, and alert the reader that something has been changed or added to an existing quote.

1. **Enclosing Information**
   A. Many organizations (i.e. the World Health Organization [WHO]) support immunizations to prevent the spread of contagious diseases.
      I. Note: the brackets are used within a parenthetical phrase to introduce the abbreviation for the World Health Organization

2. **Emphasizing a Word or Phrase**
   A. The student wrote, "I don't want to talk about the prinsiple [*sic*] cause of my attitude."
      I. In this quote, *principle* is misspelled. Do not correct a misspelled word when directly quoting; instead, alert the reader of the misspelled word.
         1. To *alert* the reader of a misspelled word that is inside a quote, you will use the [*sic*], which comes from the Latin phrase sic erat scriptum or thus it was written; we use sic instead of writing the entire phrase out. Note that "sic" within the brackets is *italicized*, but the brackets are not.

3. **Adding Information**
   A. Johns wrote, "You cannot take them [the chickens] from the farmers."
      I. The bracketed information provides the reader with the antecedent of the "them"—the chickens.

Parentheses are used to emphasize the information that they enclose. Parentheses can be used to set off nonessential elements from its sentence. They are also used to enclose numbers or letters that precede the members of a list, enclose citation materials, or provide an acronym for a longer title.

1. **Set Off Nonessential Material**:
   A. Lay people (and some scholars) define language as the way one speaks.

2. **Enclose the letters or numbers in a list of items:**
   A. The doctor warned John to avoid the following: (1) smoking, (2) drinking, and (3) candy.

3. **Indicate a citation:**
   A. Joseph Williams (2007) claims, "Your readers want you to write clearly, but not in Dick-and-Jane sentences (p. 49).

4. **Provide an acronym for a longer title:**
   A. Native English speakers (NES) often struggle with their written English.

In formal and business writing, excessive use of parentheses can be distracting – use them sparingly.