Punctuation Guide

- Punctuation indicates inflections and emphases in writing. Writers use it to clarify the meaning they are conveying through their work.

Why Use a Comma?

- Commas have grammatical purpose. They **do not** just indicate pauses in Standard English. Thus, writers should use commas intentionally to avoid making comma splices or sentence fragments. (See "Identifying & Revising Sentence Fragments" for more information.)

7 Comma Rules

1. **Separate Items in a Series**: writers should use commas to separate items in a list of three or more items. (See "Parallel Sentence Structure" for additional information.)

   - Charlie walked <u>down the hill, through the woods, and across the road</u> to buy a soda.

2. **Join Independent Clauses**: writers use a comma and conjunction to join two independent clauses together. (See the "Sentence Variety Chart" for additional information.)

   - Hannah needed a study break<u>, so</u> she went for a drive to clear her head.
   - Mary used to ice skate<u>, and</u> she was a dancer.

3. **Set Off Introductory Elements**: introductory elements are adverbial phrases that modify a complete sentence. Writers should include a comma after an introductory element in order to avoid confusion.

   - <u>Outside,</u> the field was muddy from the rain.
   - <u>Walking into the Library,</u> Jaclyn remembered she left her textbook at home.

4. **Set Off Parenthetical Elements**: parenthetical elements (appositives and nonessentials) are phrases that add detail to a sentence but can be removed without making the sentence a fragment. Writers using parenthetical elements/appositive phrases should put a comma before and after the phrase.

   - Josh took his favorite book, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close,* to the park.
   - Samuel<u>, eager to start classes</u>, walked briskly to his first class.

5. **Separate Coordinate Adjectives**: when writers use two adjectives consecutively to modify a noun, they need to separate the adjectives with a comma.

   - The students trembled as their <u>strict, overbearing professor</u> passed out the exams.

6. **Set Off Direct Quotes**: writers introducing complete sentences or clauses in quotation marks need to include a comma before it.

   - Ashleigh called<u>, "</u>You forgot your paper!"
   - Williams (2014) said<u>, "</u>it is good to write clearly, and anyone can do it" (p. 2).

7. **Set Off Contrasts:** writers use commas to set off phrases (*not* complete clauses) that express contrast. **NOTE:** *Writers should be cautious when using this rule not to make comma splices by joining two independent clauses together without a conjunction.*

   - Elizabeth asked for broccoli, not fries.
   - Heather was very excited, yet tired.

Colons

- Writers use colons at the end of complete sentences to introduce additional information, such as lists or dialogue.

  - Donnie called me from the store: "They are out of pepperoni pizza!"
  - Alexis needed three ingredients from the market: flour, sugar, and eggs.

Semicolons

- Writers use semicolons in complex lists where the items have commas within them.

  - I have <u>a dog, a poodle; a cat, a Siamese; and a bird, a parakeet</u>.

- They also use semicolons to combine two complete thoughts using coordinate phrases. (See the "Sentence Variety Chart" for additional information.)

  - The office door was wide open<u>; however,</u> no one appeared to be inside.

Dashes

- Writers use dashes to offset parenthetical or non-essential information that contain commas.

  - The style manuals<u>—APA, MLA, and Turabian—</u>are sometimes hard to navigate.
  - My new car<u>—a Toyota Camry, which is a hybrid—</u>runs on gas and electricity.

- They also use dashes to indicate a shift in tone or thought.

  - I waited in the checkout line for an hour<u>—and the cash register went down!</u>

Parentheses

- Writers use parentheses to offset information from the sentence (See Comma Rule 4). The information inside parentheses is not considered part of the sentence, so writers need to format their subjects and verbs appropriately. Writers also need to include appropriate punctuation within the parentheses if the clause stands alone.

  - Julie walked her dog <u>(a dachshund)</u> to the park.
  - Eleanor <u>(and her siblings)</u> was excited to go to Disney World.
  - Anne was late <u>(by an hour!).</u>
  - Molly was early. <u>(She didn't set her clock according to Daylight Savings Time.)</u>

Brackets

- In scholarly writing, writers use brackets *only* within direct quotes when they need to add information or include comments.

  - "Witnesses saw him <u>[the father]</u> at the scene of the crime."
  - "[F]emurs are the strongest and largest bones in the body."