

# Punctuation Marks

## How We Use Them in Writing

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### Consequences of Mispunctuation

A woman, without her man, is nothing.

A woman: without her, man is nothing.

From *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, calendar entry 18 January

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### Topics:

- Commas
- Comma Splices
- Introductory Clauses
- Apostrophes
- Semicolons
- Quotation Marks
- Punctuating Direct Quotations
- Italics
- Colons
- Parentheses & Brackets
- Dashes
- Exclamation Points and Question Marks

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### The Comma

*a misused, overused, underused squiggle*

Use commas to separate three or more items in a series.

Any Tom, Dick, or Harry can learn to use a comma.

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### The Comma

*a misused, overused, underused squiggle*

You do not use a comma with two items in a list.

Any Tom or Harry can learn to use a comma.

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### The Comma

*a misused, overused, underused squiggle*

Use commas between two or more adjectives that modify the same noun or pronoun.

Jane is a kind, considerate, caring individual.

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## The Comma

Use commas to separate dates or locations.

Adrian was born on February 27, 1987.

Meet me at 22 Acadia Street, Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

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## The Comma

Use commas to isolate appositives from the rest of the sentence. An appositive is a word or phrase that has the same meaning as the preceding noun phrase.

Mick Jagger, the lead singer of the Rolling Stones, is quite rich.

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## The Comma

Use commas to separate non-restrictive (non-essential) phrases, or clauses.

The wallet, which was full of money, was found on the street.

The phrase "*which was full of money*" is non-restrictive because it merely adds additional information about the wallet.

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## The Comma

No commas are used in restrictive (essential) phrases, or clauses.

People sitting in the rear could not hear.

The phrase "sitting in the rear" is restrictive or necessary to complete the meaning of the sentence.

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## The Comma

Use commas between independent clauses that are joined by co-ordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet).

I like coffee, but Lise prefers tea.

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## The Comma

Use the comma after a word, phrase, or clause that comes before an independent clause.

Sean, you're the man!

No matter how hard I try, I'll never forget you.

If you think I'm kidding, you don't know me very well.

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## The Comma Splice

(is not an illegal cable hookup)

Occurs when two main clauses are “spliced”, or incorrectly joined, by a comma. The comma splice fails to show the relationship between two clauses.

- ✗ Greg had too much to drink, he got the hiccups.
- ✓ Greg had too much to drink; he got the hiccups.
- ✓ Greg had too much to drink, and he got the hiccups.
- ✓ Because Greg had too much to drink, he got the hiccups.
- ✗ His roommate was the designated driver, she took him home.
- ✓ His roommate was the designated driver; she took him home.
- ✓ His roommate was the designated driver, so she took him home.
- ✓ His roommate was the designated driver. She took him home.

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## The Introductory Clause

(is not Santa's advance scout)

Where would you place the comma in the following examples?

Since it was raining we decided to go to the movies.

Since it was raining, we decided to go to the movies.

SC S V S V

Once the movie began I fell asleep.

Once the movie began, I fell asleep.

S V S V

After the movie ended we went out for coffee.

After the movie ended, we went out for coffee.

S V S V

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## The Apostrophe

(doesn't have to be a catastrophe)

One of the most misused pieces of punctuation in the English language

In the 1990's,

In the 1990s

In the '90s

In the '90s (not academic)

The researchers work

The researcher's work (one researcher)

The researchers work

The researchers' work (many researchers)

Society doesn't

Society does not

(no contractions in academic papers)

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## The Apostrophe

Add 's to the singular form of the word (even if it ends in -s):

The researcher's data

Socrates's argument

The society's decision

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## The Apostrophe

Add 's to the plural forms that do not end in -s:

the children's interaction

the geese's honking

Add ' to the end of plural nouns that end in -s:

The societies' decisions

three friends' essays

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## The Apostrophe

Add 's to the end of compound words:

my brother-in-law's money

Add 's to the last noun to show joint possession of an object:

Maclsaac and Burke's hockey game

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## The Semicolon

The semi-colon (;) joins two sentences into one, without *and* or *but*. This can be a very effective construction, but you must have a complete sentence on either side of the semicolon.

### *complete thought*

*Margie Gillis's dancing is inspirational and energetic; its strength and beauty are well known to Canada's lovers of dance.*

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## The Semicolon

Semicolons can also be used with a transitional word or phrase when it is used to join two main clauses.

The store will not accept personal cheques; **however**, they will accept credit cards or traveler's cheques.

Other transitional words used frequently with semicolons are:  
moreover,  
furthermore,  
hence,  
as a result,  
consequently,

*Note the comma is always necessary with this structure*

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## The Semicolon

Semicolons are also appropriate to punctuate a complex list of items which include commas.

On his fishing trip, Jeff caught rainbow, brook, and lake trout; large-mouth, small mouth, and white bass; and a few northern pike.

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## Patterns for Semi-Colon Use

\_\_\_\_\_ ; \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ; however, \_\_\_\_\_

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## The Colon

*(is not an internal organ)*

Use the colon to separate two sentences when the second sentence explains, illustrates, or supplements the first.

Flight attendants must explain aircraft safety features prior to take-off: they show passengers how to properly use seat belts, oxygen masks, and emergency exits.

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## The Colon

*(is not an internal organ)*

Use a colon after an independent clause to highlight a single word.

Thomas King's writing can be summed up in one word: **brilliant**.

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## The Colon

Use a colon [ : ] after an independent clause that introduces a formal series. Words often used before the colon are:

the following:  
as follows:  
namely these:  
such as:

The goat ate the following items: three tin cans, a glove, a discarded gum wrapper, and five shoelaces.

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## Quotation Marks

You can emphasize words in certain situations using quotation marks (“..”).

Here is a neutral instance, in which the writer wants to signal that she is referring to a specific word used by Rousseau:

Rousseau’s “freedom” is difficult for Americans to comprehend.

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## Punctuating Direct Quotations

Direct quotations are another person’s exact words – either spoken or in print –incorporated into your own writing. Use quotation marks to enclose each direct quotation included in your writing.

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## Examples:

Use a capital letter with the first word of a direct quotation of a whole sentence. Do not use a capital letter with the first word of a direct quotation of part of a sentence.

Mr. and Mrs. Allen stated that they “refused to use that pesticide” (105) because of possible water pollution.

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## Punctuating Direct Quotations

Use a comma to introduce a quotation after a standard dialogue tag, a brief introductory phrase, or a dependent clause.

As Nachas explains, “The gestures used for greeting others differ greatly from one culture to another”(32).

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## Punctuating Direct Quotations

Use a colon to introduce a quotation after an independent clause.

D. H. Nachas explains cultural differences in greeting customs: “Touching is not a universal sign of greeting. While members of European cultures meet and shake hands as a gesture of greeting, members of Asian cultures bow to indicate respect” (32).

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_quote.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_quote.html)<sub>0</sub>

## Examples:

If the quotation is interrupted and then continues in your sentence, do not capitalize the second part of the quotation.

“Fruit fly life cycles are easy to study,” Wilson said, “especially since the species’ lifespan is two weeks” (356).

Put commas and periods within closing quotation marks, except when a parenthetical reference follows the quotation.

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## Italics

Use italics for foreign words used in English writing:

Machiavelli also uses *virtù* in its traditional sense of goodness or morality.

There are various exceptions, however, to this rule: foreign titles, quotations entirely in a foreign language, and the many words which have entered English usage through frequent use. Consult a style guide appropriate to your discipline for detailed help.

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## Parentheses & Brackets

The proper symbols to use in English prose for parenthetical remarks are (and), not [ ] or { }

If you need to alter a direct quotation to maintain “flow”, use the square brackets [ ].

Make sure that you put spaces outside, not inside, each parenthesis: not ( this ), but (this). Punctuation follows parentheses without a space.

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## The Dash

(is not the sprint to your 8:15 class)

Use a dash to emphasise information.

**Example:**

Last night Nicole won the lottery – in her dreams.

Use a dash to indicate a break in thought.

**Example:**

I told Brenda – or was it Melanie – that I don’t like tea.

Use dashes to highlight a list.

**Example:**

Tom used everything he could think of – poison, cats, dynamite – but he still could not rid his barn of rats.

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## But what about ! and ?

Exclamation marks should be avoided except in the rarest of occasions.

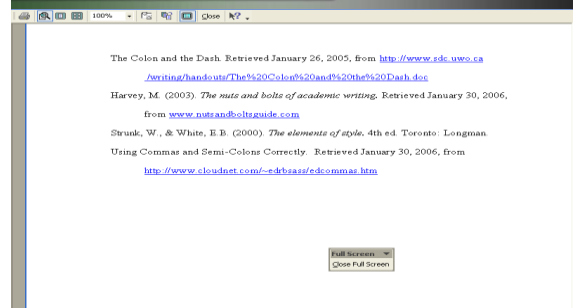
Question marks can be used VERY sparingly. They should be followed with a possible answer. Also, consider the style of essay, its subject, and your audience.

**Example:**

Do our beliefs affect our work? To what extent do metaphysical reflections, religious faith, or scientific dogma influence the science, as distinct from the weekend thought, of scientists? It would be nice to think that nothing would influence a scientist’s search for the objective facts. Reality often says otherwise. . . .

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## References



The screenshot shows a web browser window with a list of references. The browser's address bar shows a URL. The references listed are:

- The Colon and the Dash. Retrieved January 26, 2005, from <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/handouts/The%20Colon%20and%20the%20Dash.doc>
- Harvey, M. (2003). *The nuts and bolts of academic writing*. Retrieved January 30, 2006, from [www.nutsandboltsguide.com](http://www.nutsandboltsguide.com)
- Strunk, W., & White, E. B. (2000). *The elements of style*. 4th ed. Toronto: Longman.
- Using Commas and Semi-Colons Correctly. Retrieved January 30, 2006, from <http://www.cloudnet.com/~rdk/raaz/edcommas.htm>

At the bottom right of the browser window, there are two buttons: "Full Screen" and "Close Full Screen".

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