

Grammar Workshop

Punctuation*



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What is Punctuation?



- When speaking, we can pause or change the tone of our voices to indicate emphasis. When writing, we use punctuation to indicate these places of emphases.

Review of terms:

- Independent clause: a clause that has a subject and a verb and can stand alone; a complete sentence
- Dependent clause: a clause that has a subject and a verb but cannot stand alone; an incomplete sentence

When to Use a Comma



- A comma is a valuable, useful punctuation device because it separates the structural elements of sentences into manageable segments.
- A comma is a punctuation mark that indicates a pause is needed in a sentence.
- Commas help to clarify meaning for the reader.

When to Use a Comma



The Rules:

- Use a comma to join 2 independent clauses by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, for, nor, so).
 - Road construction can be inconvenient, **but** it is necessary.
 - The new house has a large fenced backyard, **so** I am sure our dog will enjoy it.
- Use a comma after an introductory phrase, prepositional phrase, or dependent clause.
 - **To get a good grade**, you must complete all your assignments.
 - **Because Dad caught the chicken pox**, we canceled our vacation.
 - **After the wedding**, the guests attended the reception.

When to Use a Comma



- A Series: Use a comma to separate elements in a series. Although there is no set rule that requires a comma before the last item in a series, it seems to be a general academic convention to include it.
 - On her vacation, Lisa visited Greece, Spain, and Italy.
 - In their speeches, many of the candidates promised to help protect the environment, bring about world peace, and end world hunger.

How many items did Tom buy at the store?

- I went to the store to buy eggs, milk, fruit juice, bread, macaroni and cheese.
- I went to the store to buy eggs, milk, fruit, juice, bread, macaroni and cheese.
- I went to the store to buy eggs, milk, fruit, juice, bread, macaroni, and cheese.

When to Use a Comma



- Use a comma to separate nonessential elements from a sentence. More specifically, when a sentence includes information that is not crucial to the message or intent of the sentence, enclose it in or separate it by commas.
 - John's truck, **a red Chevrolet**, needs new tires.
 - My mom gave me a new sweater for Christmas, **which is my favorite holiday**.
- Use a comma between coordinate adjectives (adjectives that are equal and reversible).
 - The **irritable, fidgety** crowd waited impatiently for the rally speeches to begin.
 - The **sturdy, compact** suitcase made a perfect gift.

When to Use a Comma



- Use a comma after a transitional element (however, therefore, nonetheless, also, otherwise, finally, instead, thus, of course, above all, for example, in other words, as a result, on the other hand, in conclusion, in addition)
 - **For example**, the Red Sox, Yankees, and Indians are popular baseball teams.
 - If you really want to get a good grade this semester, **however**, you must complete all assignments, attend class, and study your notes.
- Use a comma with quoted words.
 - "Yes," she promised. Todd replied, saying, "I will be back this afternoon."
 - **Tip: The punctuation ALWAYS goes inside the quotation marks!**

When to Use a Comma



- Use a comma in a date
 - October 25, 1999
 - Monday, October 25, 1999
 - 25 October 1999
- Use a comma in a number
 - 15,000,000
 - 1614 High Street
- Use a comma in a personal title
 - Pam Smith, MD
 - Mike Rose, Chief Financial Officer for Operations, reported the quarter's earnings.
- Use a comma to separate a city name from the state
 - West Lafayette, Indiana
 - Dallas, Texas

Comma Splice: Avoid it!



A Comma Splice: Two independent clauses joined only by a comma.

- You must separate the clauses with a period, with a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction, or with a semicolon.

Incorrect:

- It was cold outside, I put on my jacket.

Correct:

- It was cold outside; I put on my jacket.
- It was cold outside, **so** I put on my jacket.
- It was cold outside. I put on my jacket.

Semicolon



The Rules:

- Use a semicolon to join 2 independent clauses when the second clause restates the first or when the two clauses are of equal emphasis.
 - Pothole repairs in Washington, DC have hindered travel around town; streets have become covered with trucks and cones.
 - The parade will include a marching band and dancers; barriers have been placed along the parade route.

Semicolon



- Use a semicolon to join 2 independent clauses when the second clause begins with:
 - a conjunctive adverb (however, therefore, moreover, furthermore, thus, meanwhile, nonetheless, otherwise) OR
 - a transition (in fact, for example, that is, for instance, in addition, in other words, on the other hand, even so).
 - ✦ Sharks are perceived to be dangerous animals; **in fact**, approximately 250 sharks attacked humans last year.
- Use a semicolon to join elements of a series when individual items of the series already include commas
 - The most beautiful beaches in the world include **Bora Bora, Tahiti; the Hamptons, New York; and Lanikai Beach, Hawaii.**

Colon



- Use a colon to join 2 independent clauses when you wish to emphasize the second clause.
 - Pothole repairs in Washington, DC have hindered travel around town: parts of Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Nebraska Avenue are closed during the repairs.
- Use a colon after an independent clause when it is followed by a list, a quotation, appositive, or other idea directly related to the independent clause.
 - Sam went to the store for some groceries: eggs, fruit, milk and bread.
 - In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln urges Americans to rededicate themselves to the unfinished work of the deceased soldiers: "It is for us the living..."
 - I know the perfect job for him: a graphic designer.

Colon



- Use a colon at the end of a business letter greeting.
 - To Whom It May Concern:
- Use a colon to separate the hour and minute(s) in a time notation.
 - 12:00 p.m.
- Use a colon to separate the chapter and verse in a Biblical reference.
 - John 1:6

Parenthesis



- Parentheses are used to emphasize content. They place more emphasis on the enclosed content than commas.
- Use parentheses to set off nonessential material, such as dates, clarifying information, or sources, from a sentence.
 - Justice Antonin Scalia (1936-2016), was a Supreme Court Justice for 30 years and known for writing controversial opinions.
- Use parenthesis for in-text citations. The punctuation goes AFTER the citation to sandwich the text with the cited source.
 - Justice Antonin Scalia was born in Trenton, NJ in 1936 (Rampulla 236).
- Instead of parenthesis, you can use parenthetical commas around parenthetical words or phrases. Parenthetical words and phrases add extra information to a sentence without altering its basic meaning.
 - My nephew, who loves to build Legos, is visiting next week.

Dash



- Dashes are used to set off or emphasize the content enclosed within dashes or the content that follows a dash. Dashes place more emphasis on this content than parentheses.
 - Perhaps one reason why the term has been so problematic—so resistant to definition, and yet so transitory in those definitions—is because of its multitude of applications.
 - In terms of public legitimacy—that is, in terms of garnering support from state legislators, parents, donors, and university administrators—English departments are primarily places where advanced literacy is taught.
 - To some of you, my proposals may seem radical—even revolutionary.
- Use a dash to set off an appositive phrase that already includes commas. An appositive is a word that adds explanatory or clarifying information to the noun that precedes it.
 - The cousins—Tina, Todd, and Sam—arrived at the party together.

Need Additional Help?



- Visit the Academic Support and Access Center: Mary Graydon Center, Room 243, 202-885-3360
 - We recommend that you book an appointment online first:

The screenshot shows the website for the American University Academic Support & Access Center. The header includes the American University logo and navigation links for Admissions, Academics, Research, University Life, Alumni, and About. The main content area features a video player for the Writing Lab, which offers free and individual writing assistance. Below the video, there are sections for 'WHERE TO GET THE HELP YOU NEED IN THE ASAC', 'IMPORTANT DATES', and 'QUICK LINKS'. The 'QUICK LINKS' section includes links for Test Accommodations Request Form, Learning Services Program, Request a Tutor, ASAC Workshop Schedule, Current SI Schedule, Request an Interpreter, Register for Accommodations for the First Time, and Apply to Tutor. The 'WRITING LAB OPEN FOR' section is partially visible at the bottom right.

Need Additional Help?



Helpful Online Resources

- **American University Writing Lab Tips:**
<http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/Writing-Lab-Writing-Tips.cfm>
- **Purdue Online Writing Lab (Owl):**
owl.english.purdue.edu
- **UNC Writing Center:** writingcenter.unc.edu
- **The George Mason University Writing Center:**
<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>
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