

PUNCTUATION REVIEW

When you write, it is important to punctuate your sentences correctly. You need to punctuate so that your readers will be able to read your thoughts correctly and be able to understand what you have written.

There are several punctuation marks with which you should become familiar. These include: the period . the question mark ? the exclamation point ! the comma , the apostrophe ‘ the semi-colon ; the dash--, the hyphen-, parentheses () and quotation marks “ ”.

Each of these punctuation marks has a purpose and when used correctly adds precision to your writing. Let's review the use of each punctuation mark. Probably the greatest problem you may have encountered in punctuating may have been with the use of the comma and the semicolon. Sometimes it is difficult to know when to use punctuation marks, but if you follow the rules of punctuation, it will make it easier to know when and how to punctuate correctly.

The first and probably the most familiar punctuation mark is the **period**. The **period** is used at the end of a declarative sentence. That is, it is used at the end of a sentence that makes a statement. Examples: The room is large. The weather is warm today. The **period** is also used at the end of the imperative sentence. This is a sentence that requests or tells someone to do something. Examples: Bring your book to class. Leave your shoes by the front door.

The **question mark** is used at the end of an interrogative sentence. An interrogative sentence asks a question: Examples: Do you drive a car or a truck? How many weeks is it until Christmas?

The **exclamation point** is used at the end of the exclamatory sentence. It shows surprise or strong emotion but should be used infrequently. Examples: I'm having a great time! What an incredible view!

The **comma** is often mistakenly used. It really indicates a very short pause. You can use the comma to: (1) separate items in a series. Examples: Do you drink coffee, tea or milk? The dog ran away, the cat got locked in the closet, and the parakeet flew away from its cage. (2) set off introductory material. Examples: Looking at the river, Joe saw several large floating logs. Also, the river was higher and swifter than ever before. (3) Before and after words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence. Examples: The last holiday of the summer, Labor Day, had come and gone quickly. Everyone knew the boy, the fastest runner on the team, as the best athlete in the history of the school. (4) Between two complete thoughts connected by and, for, but or nor, so, yet. Examples: The baseball game was scheduled early, but it got rained out. Brian has class on Saturday mornings, so he can not sleep as late as he would like. (5) To set off a direct quote from

Punctuation Review/2

the rest of a sentence. Examples: “No,” said Jane to Michael. “I’m not interested in going to the concert.” Her mother asked, “What time did you get home?”

(6) With everyday material. You will need to use commas when people are spoken to.

Examples: Linda, do you want to go to lunch? Bob, please take out the trash. Also, you will need to use a comma when you write dates. Example: September 12, 1998.

Another use of the **comma** in everyday material is in addresses. Example: Todd’s grandmother lives at 731 Cedar St., Independence, Missouri 64052. Notice that no comma is used to mark off the zip code. You will also need to use a **comma** for the openings and closings of letters. Examples: Dear Dan, Sincerely yours, In a formal letter, a colon is used after the opening. Examples: Dear Sir: Dear Mr. Smith: An additional use of **commas** is to separate numbers. Example: The island is 2,500 miles from the United States.

Sometimes, people get the **semicolon** confused with the colon. The semicolon is made up of a period above a comma and is sometimes called the strong comma. It signals more of a pause than a comma alone but does have the full pause of a period.

You can use a **semicolon** instead of a comma and a joining word or conjunction. Examples: (Without the semicolon) The restaurant was crowded, and the food was cold. Instead, you can write—The restaurant was crowded; the food was cold. The semicolon adds to your sentence variety. Sometime, a **semicolon** is used with a transitional word and a comma to join two complete thoughts. Examples: I have a research paper to write; however, I can not go to the library until after tomorrow.

Another form of punctuation is the **apostrophe**. It is used to combine two shortened words into one, as in a contraction. are+ not= aren’t , I+ will= I’ll The **apostrophe** also forms the possessive case of plural nouns ending in s. Examples: We gave the Wilson’s’ dog a bone. The ladies’ coats were in the hall closet. Notice that the **apostrophe** is used after the s when the word ends in s. The **apostrophe** is also used to show possession or ownership. Examples: Tony’s jacket, James’ grades, the dog’s paws.

Other punctuation marks include the **colon**. You use the **colon** at the end of a complete statement to introduce a list, a long quotation or an explanation. Examples: The people brought the following items: saws, hammers and brooms. Carlos Marighella stated in Handbook of Urban Guerrilla Warfare: “The urban guerrilla has a certain advantage over the conventional military or police. It is that, while the military and the police act on behalf of the enemy, whom the people hate, the urban guerrilla defends a just cause, which is the people’s cause.” There are two fastball pitchers in our town: McGuire and Lester.

The **dash** signals a degree of pause longer than a comma but not as complete as a period. It is used for dramatic effect. Example: The storm pounded the coastal shore—everything was destroyed. Just as the exclamation point, the **dash** should not be overused.

Punctuation Review/3

The **hyphen** is used with two or more words that combined make a single unit describing a noun. Example: He had a well-rounded personality. The hyphen is also used to divide a word at the end of a line of writing or print. You should divide a word between syllables when you need to at the end of a line. Example: Her conversation with him was limited and was not interesting enough to keep her awake.

Parentheses are used to set off extra or additional information from the rest of a sentence. You should use these sparingly. Examples: The section of our book discussing the Civil War (pages 55-85) is not very detailed. Yesterday, we went to the Blue Ridge Mall (the oldest shopping center in the city) before we left on our vacation.

Finally, **quotation marks** are used to set off the exact words of a speaker or writer. Example: “Many famous actresses had red hair,” Geri said to Frank. **Quotation marks** are also used to set off titles of short works such as articles in books, newspapers or magazines, chapters in books, short stories and songs. She listened to “The Way” on the radio. He read the article “Making your Car Ready for Winter.”

By reviewing and following the guides for punctuating your sentences, you can help make your sentences clear and your meaning immediately understandable to your readers. It may take practice to become more comfortable with these agreed-upon rules for punctuation, but it will be worth your effort to make your writing more effective and easier to read.