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Chapter 18

Punctuation

A Universal Challenge

Almost everyone finds punctuation challenging at least occasionally. Although it might be unrealistic to know the correct punctuation in every situation, you can certainly learn to make the correct choice most of the time. When you are uncertain, don't guess. Handbooks such as this one, as well as a variety of websites, are close at hand. Take the time to look up a rule when you are not sure.

Sometimes, as with many other features of grammar and mechanics, you may look up a rule and find more than one answer or even a raging debate about what is currently acceptable. That's because usage (the way people actually use a living language) changes over time, thus muddying the rules. But by doing your research, at least the choices you make will be within an accepted range of options.

18.1 Using Commas Properly

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Use introductory, series, and compound-sentence commas correctly.
2. Use commas to isolate words that are not essential to a sentence.
3. Use commas with adjectives, quotations, and details.

Commas are to readers as road signs are to drivers. Just as a driver might take a wrong turn if a sign is missing or misplaced, a reader cannot traverse a sentence meaningfully when commas are not properly in place.

Using Commas with Introductory Words, Phrases, and Clauses

Commas set introductory words, phrases, and clauses apart from the rest of a sentence. This separation serves to signal a reader to pause and to give words a chance to have meaning without interference from other words.

Examples

Single-word example: Afterward, fans came backstage and surrounded the actors and actresses.

Phrase example: Without an invitation, fans swarmed backstage in excitement.

Clause example: After the fans began to head to their cars, the actors and actresses took their first break in two hours.

Using Commas in a Series

A series is a list embedded in a sentence with a conjunction, typically the word “and,” between the last two items in the list. Without the commas, a series can be quite confusing.

Example

Series in a sentence without commas: Penny's costume included a long blue dress a red bonnet black lace-up shoes a heavy gold pendant on a chain and a very-full petticoat.

With a little work, a reader can possibly identify the five items that made up Penny's costume. But the sentence is confusing and requires too much work to read. Inserting commas makes reading this sentence very easy and clear.

Example

Series in a sentence with commas: Penny's costume included a long blue dress, a red bonnet, black lace-up shoes, a heavy gold pendant on a chain, and a very-full petticoat.

Some usage experts promote the idea that the comma immediately before the conjunction is optional since it has fallen out of universal use. However, it is still wise to use it to avoid inadvertent confusion.

Using Commas in Compound Sentences

When a sentence is made up of two independent clauses joined by a **coordinating conjunction**¹ (*and, but, for, nor/or, so, yet*), a comma is needed between the two clauses. Remember that an independent clause must have both a subject and a verb and be able to serve as a stand-alone sentence. (See [Chapter 15 "Sentence Building"](#), [Section 15.1 "Incorporating Core Sentence Components \(Avoiding Fragments\)"](#) for more on sentence components.)

1. A word used to link two independent clauses in a compound sentence (e.g., *and, but, for, so, nor, or, yet*); when used in this way, it is preceded by only a comma.

Examples

Example of a compound sentence with two independent clauses: Mitch arrived an hour early for the first rehearsal, and he spent the time looking through the costume closets.

Example of a sentence with two clauses, one of which is not independent: Mitch arrived an hour early for the first rehearsal and spent the time looking through the costume closets.

Using Commas to Isolate Nonessential Words within a Sentence

To create interest and increase clarification, you may want to add words and phrases to basic sentences. These additional pieces often function as add-ons that are not essential to the core meaning of the sentence and do not change the meaning of the sentence. You should separate such words and phrases from the rest of the sentence. Some examples of **nonessential words**² include adjective phrases and clauses, words of direct address, interjections, and appositives.

Adjective Phrases and Clauses

Some adjective phrases and clauses are essential to the meaning of a sentence and some are not. If they are essential, no comma is needed. If the meaning of the sentence would be intact if the phrase or clause were removed, a comma is needed. You can identify adjective clauses since they often begin with the relative pronouns *where*, *when*, *which*, *who*, *whom*, *whose*, or *that*.

Example

Comma needed: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which was Malik's first play, lasted almost two hours.

2. A word that is in a sentence but could be removed without changing the core meaning of the sentence.

A comma is needed because, even without the adjective phrase, the reader would know that the play lasted for two hours.

Example

Commas not needed: Actors who give constant effort can inspire others in the cast to do well.

A comma is not needed because the phrase “who give constant efforts” clarifies which actors are being referenced within the sentence. Since the sentence meaning would not be complete without the phrase, no comma is needed.

Words of Direct Address

Some sentences name the person being spoken to. A person’s name that is used in this way is called a **noun in direct address**³. Since naming the person does not change the meaning of the sentence, you should separate such a name from the rest of the sentence.

Example

Your performance, Penny, was absolutely amazing!

Interjections

Some words interrupt the flow of a sentence but do not actually change the meaning of the sentence. Such words are known as **interjections**⁴ and should be set apart from the rest of the sentence with commas. Aside from “yes” and “no,” most interjections express a sudden emotion.

- Yes, I am going to the Saturday matinee performance.
- I suppose you will think it is a problem if I don’t arrive until a few minutes before the curtain goes up, huh?
- There is a chance, drat, that I might miss the first few minutes.

3. A noun that names the person being spoken to within a sentence.

4. A word that interrupts the flow of a sentence but does not actually change the meaning of the sentence.

Appositives

Appositives⁵ are nouns or noun phrases that restate an immediately preceding noun or noun phrase.

Malik’s first play, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, had six performances.

Malik only has one “first” play, so the title of the play is a restatement of “Malik’s first play.” Since this sentence is complete with all meaning intact even if the words “*To Kill a Mockingbird*” were removed, the words need to be separated with commas.

My husband, Kyle, has visited the *To Kill a Mockingbird* museum in Monroeville.

Since “my husband” identifies a single person, the name “Kyle” merely restates his identity and thus adds no new information. Therefore, “Kyle” should be set apart with commas.

Using Commas with Coordinate Adjectives

You should place a comma between **coordinate adjectives**⁶ that are not joined with the word “and.” Coordinate adjectives are double adjectives and can be joined with the word “and,” rearranged, or both and still work fine.

Example

Sentence with coordinate adjectives: Atticus is a good role for Malik since Malik is a tall, stately guy.

5. A noun or noun phrase that restates an immediately preceding noun or noun phrase.

6. Double adjectives that are not joined with the word “and” but that could be joined with the word “and” or could be rearranged and still work fine.

7. Consecutive adjectives that build on each other in meaning.

This sentence requires commas since Malik could be “a stately, tall guy,” or he could be “tall and stately,” or he could be “stately and tall.”

Do not use commas between cumulative adjectives. **Cumulative adjectives**⁷ build on each other, modify the next one in line, and do not make sense if rearranged.

Example

Sentence with cumulative adjectives: Atticus Finch is a dedicated defense attorney.

This is a cumulative adjective situation because it would not work to rearrange the adjectives to say “defense dedicated attorney” or “dedicated and defense attorney.” Therefore, no commas are needed in this example; the adjective “defense” modifies “attorney” and the adjective “dedicated” modifies “defense attorney.”

Using Commas with Dialogue and Direct Quotations

You should use a comma prior to or just after the quotations in dialogue. Also, use a comma before a **direct quotation**⁸ when preceded by a verb such as declares, says, or writes.

Example

Comma before dialogue: Jem said, “There goes the meanest man that ever took a breath of life.”

Comma after dialogue: “The one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience,” said Atticus Finch.

No comma needed before or after a direct quotation that is not preceded by a verb: According to Miss Maudie Atkinson, Atticus “can make somebody’s will so airtight you can’t break it.”

No comma needed before or after an indirect quotation: Atticus told Jem that it was a sin to kill a mockingbird.

8. The exact word or words spoken.

Using Commas When Inserting Details into Text

Details such as dates, addresses, geographic names, company names, letter and e-mail components, titles that go with names, and numbers all require commas when used in text and sometimes when used alone.

Dates

When a date is written in month–day–year order in isolation, you need to use a comma between the day and year.

December 25, 1962

When a date is written in month–day–year order within a sentence and does not fall at the end of the sentence, you need to use a comma between the day and year and between the year and the rest of the sentence.

On December 25, 1962, the movie *To Kill a Mockingbird* opened in theaters.

Addresses

When an address is written in mailing format, commas are needed between the city and state.

Old Courthouse Museum

Courthouse Square

31 N. Alabama Ave.

Monroeville, AL 36460

When an address is written within running text, commas are needed between the city and state as well as between each of the “lines” of the address and between the address and the rest of the sentence if the address does not fall at the end of the sentence.

Annual performances of *To Kill a Mockingbird* are performed in the Old Courthouse Museum, Courthouse Square, 31 N. Alabama Ave., Monroeville, AL 36460, near where author Harper Lee grew up.

Geographic Names

Use a comma after each item within a place name when the place name is used in running text, even when it is not part of a complete address.

Atticus Finch lived and worked in the fictitious city of Maycomb, Alabama, which many assume is patterned somewhat after Monroeville, Alabama, where the author grew up.

Company Names

Company names that include “incorporated” or “limited” (or the like) require a comma between the name and “Inc.” or “Ltd.” only when a comma is placed there as part of the official company name. Check for letterhead or the company’s website for clarification on its preferred usage.

Invesco Ltd.

Replacements, Ltd.

Citigroup, Inc.

Citizens Inc.

When “incorporated” or “limited” is part of a company name within a sentence, a comma is needed between the word and the rest of the sentence only when a comma precedes it.

Citigroup, Inc., is making some noise in the banking industry lately.

Invesco Ltd. started out slowly in that sector of the market.

Letter and E-mail Greetings and Closings

Commas are used to separate letter and e-mail components both in isolation and within running text.

- Dear Alice,
- Sincerely,
- Hi, Jerry,
- Later,

Titles That Go with Names

Use commas to set off descriptive titles that follow names. However, don't use a comma before "Jr." or "III" (or the like) unless you know the person prefers a comma.

- Atticus Finch, attorney-at-law
- John Hale Finch, MD
- Walter Cunningham Jr.

Within text, include a comma both before and after the descriptive title to set it off from the whole sentence.

Atticus Finch, attorney-at-law, at your service.

Numbers

In numbers with more than four digits, begin at the right and add a comma after every third digit. In a four-digit number, a comma is omitted in page and line numbers, addresses, and years, and it is optional in other cases. No commas are used in numbers with less than four digits. Numbers are treated exactly the same when used in text.

- 335,353,235
- 8,302 (as number, comma is optional)
- as year, no comma)
- 38,231
- 200 (no comma)

Example

In an Internet search for “reviews of *To Kill a Mockingbird*,” 2,420,000 results surfaced.

Using Commas to Avoid Confusion

Sometimes you simply have to use a comma to avoid confusion. For example, when a word is removed for effect, a comma can sometimes make up for the missing word.

To perform is a skill; to transform, art.

When two like or nearly like words are placed side by side, a comma can sometimes help clarify the intended meaning.

The whole cast came walking in, in full costume.

Sometimes you will need to use a comma so the reader understands how the words are to be grouped to attain the author’s desired meaning. Read the following example without the comma and note the difference.

Fans who can, come each year to see the annual *To Kill a Mockingbird* performance.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- You must use commas with introductory words, phrases, and clauses; between the words in a series; and between compound sentences.
- You should use commas to separate from the rest of a sentence words that are not essential to the sentence, such as adjective phrases and clauses, words of direct address, interjections, and appositives.
- You should place commas between side-by-side adjectives that independently and interchangeably modify a noun, between quotations and the rest of the sentence, and in a variety of detail-specific situations, such as dates, addresses, geographic names, company names, letter and e-mail greetings and closings, titles that go with names, and numbers.

EXERCISE

1. Add commas as needed to write each of these sentences correctly.
 - a. If you are right Darcy you and I will have amazing front-row seats.
 - b. Tonight I am going with Allen Beth Daryl Salome and Tommy.
 - c. When Malik jumped off the stage I naturally jumped about forty-five thousand feet in the air.
 - d. I grew up in Stockton Illinois on a farm and my friend grew up in Fort Madison Iowa in town.
 - e. If you arrive before I do save me a seat.
 - f. When I called she said “Mark Lucster Jr. wants to come with us.”

18.2 Avoiding Unnecessary Commas

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify some categories of unnecessary commas.
2. Avoid using unnecessary commas.

To use or not to use? That is the question when it comes to commas. Just as you want to be sure to use commas in all the correct places, you also want to make sure to avoid using commas when you don't need them.

- Do not use commas before a conjunction when the sentence is not compound.
No comma: Scout thinks Calpurnia is harshX and unfairly gets Atticus on her side.
- Do not use a comma before the first and after the last word in a series.
No comma: The actorsX Gregory Peck, Phillip Alford, Estelle Evans, Robert Duvall, and Mary BadhamX play some of the main characters in the *To Kill a Mockingbird* movie.
- Do not use commas around an appositive if it adds clarity, or new information, to the sentence. For example, in the following sentence, “Joey” identifies which cousin played the part.
No comma: My cousinX JoeyX once played the part of Atticus Finch.
- Do not use a comma to set off an adverb clause that is essential to the sentence's meaning. Adverb clauses are usually essential when they begin with *after*, *as soon as*, *because*, *before*, *if*, *since*, *unless*, *until*, or *when*.
No comma: Scout was surprised when Calpurnia kissed herX because she didn't think Calpurnia liked her much.
- Do not use a comma around a word that could be viewed as an interjection if using the comma would cause confusion or interruption in the sentence.
No comma: Scout isX basicallyX a tomboy.
- Do not use a comma after **although**, **such as**, or **like**.

No comma: Mayella didn't seem believable because of her actions, such asX changing her mind on the stand.

- Do not use a comma after a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *for*, *nor*, *or*, *so*, and *yet*).

No comma: Jem called Atticus by his first name, soX it seemed natural for Jem to do it as well.

- Do not use a comma along with a period, question mark, or exclamation point inside of a quotation.

No comma: “Don't you remember me, Mr. Cunningham?X” asked Scout.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A comma is not needed before a conjunction if the sentence is not compound, before the first word in a series or after the last word in a series, or after an information-adding appositive.
- Do not use a comma to set apart an adverb clause that is essential to the meaning of a sentence or an interjection when the comma would interfere with the sentence.
- A comma should not be used after *although*, *such as*, or *like*; after a coordinating conjunction; or along with end punctuation inside a quotation.

EXERCISE

1. For each sentence, add and/or remove commas (replacing a comma with **X**) or indicate that no changes are needed.
 - a. I had lasagna for dinner and, it was absolutely great!
 - b. My friend Alice is coming over after work.
 - c. My mother is going to pick me up, because my father had to work late.
 - d. Tony bought a green skirt, some red shoes, a blue shirt, and a pink belt.
 - e. “The lake water is very cold!,” said Megan through shivering teeth.
 - f. Carrie skated around the room repeatedly and acted like she had been skating her whole life.

18.3 Eliminating Comma Splices and Fused Sentences

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

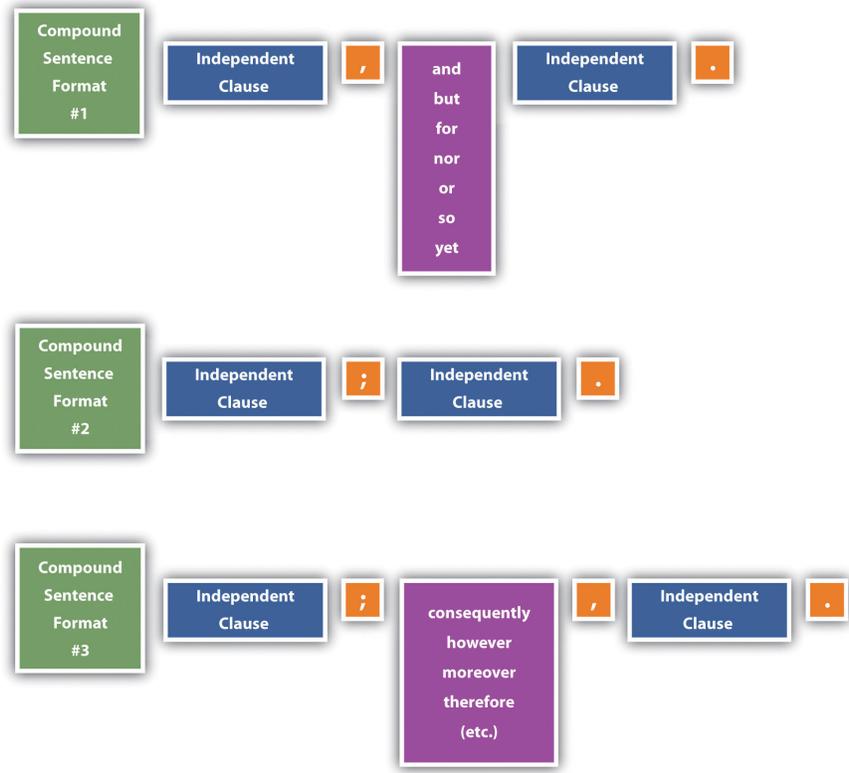
1. Use commas correctly in compound sentences.
2. Use semicolons correctly in compound sentences.
3. Recognize comma splices and fused sentences.

Two of the most common problems people have with compound sentences are **comma splices**⁹ and **fused sentences**¹⁰. The key to understanding these problems is to recognize the possible compound sentence formats:

1. two independent clauses separated with a comma and coordinating conjunction (*and, but, so, for, nor, or, yet*);
2. two independent clauses separated with a semicolon by itself;
3. two independent clauses separated with a semicolon and a **conjunctive adverb**¹¹ (*however, therefore, consequently, moreover, etc.*), used to clarify a specific logical relationship between the two independent clauses.

9. A sentence with two independent clauses joined by a comma instead of a semicolon or a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction.
10. A run-on sentence; a sentence with two independent clauses joined without punctuation.
11. A word used to link and indicate a specific logical relationship between two independent clauses (e.g., *however, therefore, moreover, consequently*); when used this way, it is preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma.

Figure 18.1



Understanding and Avoiding Comma Splices

Two different situations can result in comma splices.

Examples

Problem: A comma joins independent clauses instead of the clauses being joined by a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction.

Example: Her name was Jean Louise Finch, she wanted everyone to call her “Scout.”

Correction: Her name was Jean Louise Finch, **but** she wanted everyone to call her “Scout.”

Problem: A comma joins two independent clauses when a semicolon should be used.

Example: Atticus didn’t want Scout to fight, however, she could not ignore injustices.

Correction: Atticus didn’t want Scout to fight; however, she could not ignore injustices.

Understanding and Avoiding Fused Sentences

A fused sentence is also called a run-on sentence and occurs when two independent clauses are joined without any punctuation.

Example

Mr. Cunningham is very poor he cannot pay Atticus for legal services.

Correction option 1: Add a coordinating conjunction and a comma: Mr. Cunningham is very poor, **so** he cannot pay Atticus for legal services.

Correction option 2: Place the independent clauses into two separate sentences: Mr. Cunningham is very poor. **He** cannot pay Atticus for legal services.

Correction option 3: Place a semicolon between the two clauses: Mr. Cunningham is very poor; he cannot pay Atticus for legal services.

Correction option 4: Place a semicolon between the two clauses, and use a conjunctive adverb for further clarification: Mr. Cunningham is very poor; **therefore**, he cannot pay Atticus for his legal services.

Correction option #5: Turn one of the independent clauses into a dependent clause: Mr. Cunningham cannot pay Atticus for his legal services **because** he is very poor.

OR

Because he is very poor, Mr. Cunningham cannot pay Atticus for his legal services.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- When you use a coordinating conjunction in a compound sentence, you should place a comma before the conjunction.
- You can use a semicolon between two independent clauses without using a conjunctive adverb.
- If you use conjunctive adverbs, such as *however* or *therefore*, place a semicolon before the conjunctive adverb and a comma after it.

EXERCISES

1. Read each compound sentence. Identify each as correctly written, a comma splice, or a fused sentence. For the comma splices and fused sentences, write a corrected version.
 - a. The Gormans bought a new television, and they had it installed over the fireplace.
 - b. We are supposed to get a blizzard tonight we can't go to the movie.
 - c. My psychology teacher is leaving on a cruise on Monday; the psychology midterm has been canceled.
 - d. The wind was blowing like crazy, it grabbed my bag right out of my hand.
 - e. I didn't go to sleep until after 3:00 a.m., therefore I am exhausted today.
 - f. Donna traded her hours with Luke last night consequently, she has to work tonight.

2. Write three different versions of a correctly punctuated compound sentence made up of the following pairs of independent clauses, using each of the three formats described in this section (comma plus coordinating conjunction, semicolon only, and semicolon plus conjunctive adverb). Then write a comma splice and a fused sentence using the same pair of independent clauses. Finally, make one of the clauses dependent on the other, use a subordinating conjunction (see [Chapter 16 "Sentence Style", Section 16.3 "Using Subordination and Coordination"](#)), and punctuate the sentence accordingly.
 - He was very hungry / He ate a big lunch
 - Thunder rumbled in the distance / The skies opened up
 - The candidate ran an excellent campaign / He won the election by ten points

18.4 Writing with Semicolons and Colons

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand when to use semicolons.
2. Understand when to use colons.
3. Recognize when semicolons and colons are used incorrectly.

By the time you were taught how to use semicolons and colons in eighth grade or so, you were likely already set in your ways regarding punctuation. Here's the good news: it isn't too late to add these marks to your commonly used list and to appreciate how much they can do for your writing.

Using Semicolons

A semicolon is a punctuation mark that signals a pause that is stronger than a comma but weaker than a period. Appropriately, a semicolon (;) looks like a period on top of a comma. The standard uses for semicolons are to separate two independent clauses instead of using coordinating conjunctions, to separate two independent clauses along with a conjunctive adverb, or to clarify a series that includes other punctuation.

Compound Sentences without Coordinating Conjunctions or with Conjunctive Adverbs

Compound sentences with conjunctive adverbs or without coordinating conjunctions require a semicolon. Review [Section 18.3 "Eliminating Comma Splices and Fused Sentences"](#) for additional information.

Examples

Compound sentence with a coordinating conjunction: Scout and Jem do not know much about Boo Radley, but they are afraid of him anyhow.

Compound sentence without a coordinating conjunction: Scout and Jem do not know much about Boo Radley; they are afraid of him anyhow.

Compound sentence with a conjunctive adverb: Scout and Jem do not know much about Boo Radley; nevertheless, they are afraid of him anyhow.

Items in a Series with Commas

Typically, commas separate items in a series. Sometimes multiple-word series items include commas. In these cases, the commas within the items would be easily confused with the commas that separate the items. To avoid this confusion, you should use semicolons between these series items. You should not use semicolons to separate items in a series when the items do not include commas.

Examples

Sentence with series that results in comma confusion: In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch defends justice, the underprivileged, and his children, teaches his kids values, and stands up to the people of the town.

Sentence rewritten using semicolons to avoid comma confusion: In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch defends justice, the underprivileged, and his children; teaches his kids values; and stands up to the people of the town.

Using Colons

A colon is used to separate parts or to signal that some related information or words are coming.

Introductions

Colons are used to introduce a variety of text components, including explanations and examples.

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* won three Oscars: Best Actor; Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Black-and-White; and Best Writing, Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium.
- There is a good reason no one has ever visited Maycomb, Alabama: it is a fictitious city.

Independent Clauses Where One Restates or Supports the Other

Most sets of independent clauses require a comma and a conjunction or a semicolon between them. An exception is when the second clause clearly restates or supports the first clause.

The movie *To Kill a Mockingbird* was very well received in Hollywood: it was nominated for eight Academy Awards.

Salutations and Isolated Elements

A variety of elements call for colons to separate the details.

- Time: 5:30 p.m.
- Letter or e-mail openings: Dear Ms. Moore:
- Ratios: 4:7
- Chapters and verses: 7:2–3
- Titles: Spark Notes: *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Bibliographies: New York: Random House
- Arrangements of categories and examples (**such as this list**)

Quotations

When the lead-in to a quotation is a complete sentence, you can use a colon between the lead-in and the quotation.

Scout spoke with her usual frankness and wisdom beyond her years: “Until I feared I would lose it, I never loved to read. One does not love breathing.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Use semicolons instead of commas between items in a series when the series items have commas.
- Use a semicolon in compound sentences that do not have coordinating conjunctions.
- When you use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses, you may also elect to use a conjunctive adverb to clarify the relationship between the two clauses.
- Use colons as a way to introduce text components, such as explanations and examples, and to separate two independent clauses where one restates or supports the other.
- Use colons in salutations, time, letter or e-mail openers, ratios, chapters and verses, titles, bibliographies, arrangements of categories and examples, and quotations.

EXERCISES

1. Use a semicolon in each of these situations:
 - a. items in a series with commas
 - b. compound sentence without a coordinating conjunction
 - c. compound sentence with a conjunctive adverb
2. Use a colon in each of these situations:
 - a. to introduce a quotation
 - b. to write the current time
 - c. to write a ratio
 - d. to introduce a list
3. Read three pages of one of your textbooks. Highlight all colons and semicolons, and then determine why they are being used and whether they are being used appropriately.

18.5 Using Apostrophes

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Use apostrophes with nouns to show possession.
2. Know when to use apostrophes to show possession in pronouns.
3. Know how to use apostrophes to form contractions.

Apostrophes are a tool for making English more streamlined. Instead of saying, “the book that belongs to Elizabeth,” you can say, “Elizabeth’s book.” Instead of saying, “I cannot come,” you can say, “I can’t come.” Although you could avoid using apostrophes, your writing will be more natural if you learn the rules for using possessives and contractions appropriately. Some people also opt to use apostrophes to form plurals in certain situations, but many usage experts continue to warn against this practice.

Using Apostrophes with Nouns to Show Possession

You form a possessive when you want to show a noun or pronoun in a sentence has ownership of another noun or pronoun.

Standard Singular and Plural Nouns

As shown in the following table, most nouns follow standard patterns for forming plurals.

Situation	Rule	Example 1	Example 2
Singular noun	Add apostrophe + -s.	dog’s collar	class’s assignment
Plural noun ending in s	Add only an apostrophe.	dogs’ collars	classes’ assignments
Plural noun ending in any letter other than s	Add apostrophe + -s.	people’s plans	women’s plans
Proper nouns	Follow the regular noun rules.	Finches’ family home	Atticus’s glasses

Situation	Rule	Example 1	Example 2
Business names	Use the format the company has chosen whether or not it matches possessive formation guidelines.	McDonald's employees	Starbucks stores

Compound Nouns

When forming the possessive of a **compound noun**¹², form the possession only on the last word. Use standard guidelines for that word.

- sister-in-law's hair
- six-year-olds' growth patterns
- wallpapers' patterns
- courthouse's aura

Two or More Nouns

When two or more nouns both possess another noun, form the possession only with the second noun if you are noting joint ownership. Form a possession on both nouns if each possession is independent.

- Jem and Scout's escapades (the joint escapades of the two children)
- Jem's and Scout's escapades (the separate escapades of the two children)

Understanding Apostrophes and Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns (*his, her, hers, its, my, mine, our, ours, their, theirs, your, yours*) show possession without an apostrophe.

- Is this hat yours?
- Those are his shoes.
- The dress is hers.

Indefinite pronouns (*another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, everybody, everyone, everything, nobody, no one, nothing, one, other, others, somebody, someone, something*) require an apostrophe to show possession.

12. A noun formed by two or more words, sometimes hyphenated.

- another's problem

- everyone’s problems

Using Apostrophes to Form Contractions

Contractions¹³ are shortened versions of two or more words where an apostrophe marks the missing letters. English has a wide range of common contractions, including those in the following table.

Words in Contraction	Contraction	Words in Contraction	Contraction
I am	I’m	what will	what’ll
we are	we’re	they will	they’ll
what is	what’s	what has	what’s
can not	can’t	should not	shouldn’t
does not	doesn’t	do not	don’t

In addition to the many standard contractions, people often create custom, on-the-spot contractions.

My husband’s (husband is) also coming.

As a reader, you have to use context to know if the use of “husband’s” is possessive or a contraction since the two are visually the same.

- My husband’s also coming.
- My husband’s watch is on the table.

Using Apostrophes to Form Plurals

Some people choose to form plurals of individual letters, numbers, and words referred to as terms. Many usage experts frown on this practice and instead choose to form the plurals by simply adding an -s. Here are some examples of the two options, as well as methods of avoiding having to choose either option.

13. A shortened version of two or more words in which an apostrophe marks the missing letters.

Examples

Situation: more than one of the letter *t*

Plurals using apostrophes: There are two *t*'s in Atticus.

Plurals without using apostrophes: There are two *ts* in Atticus.

Avoiding the choice: The letter *t* shows up in Atticus twice.

Situation: more than one of the number 5

Plurals using apostrophes: If I remember right, the address has three 5's in it.

Plurals without using apostrophes: If I remember right, the address has three 5s in it.

Avoiding the choice: If I remember right, the number 5 shows up three times in the address.

Situation: more than one "there" in a sentence

Plurals using apostrophes: This sentence has five there's.

Plurals without using apostrophes: This sentence has five theres.

Avoiding the choice: The word "there" is used five times in this sentence.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Form possessives of most singular noun by adding apostrophe + -s and of most plural nouns by adding just an apostrophe. For plural nouns ending in letters other than -s add apostrophe + -s.
- In compound nouns, form the plural on the last word.
- When two or more nouns possess another noun jointly, form the possession only on the last noun. If the two nouns have independent ownership, form the possession on each noun.
- Possessive pronouns indicate possession without the use of an apostrophe. Indefinite pronouns need an apostrophe to show possession.
- In contractions, apostrophes are used to indicate omitted letters.
- It is an increasingly acceptable option to use an apostrophe to form the plurals of letters, numbers, and words referred to as terms, but many usage experts still frown on the practice.

EXERCISES

1. Use apostrophes to create contractions for these words:
 - a. we have
 - b. he will
 - c. could have
2. Use apostrophes to rewrite the following possessive situations:
 - a. a bag of apples that belong to Pete and Polly
 - b. a car that belongs to my sister-in-law
 - c. a soda that is being shared by two women
 - d. a pen that belongs to somebody in the room
 - e. a sock that belongs to him
 - f. the opinions of the students

18.6 Using Quotation Marks

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Properly place quotation marks around dialogue and borrowed words.
2. Use quotation marks with titles of short works, definitions, words used in special ways, and original words.
3. Correctly incorporate other punctuation with quotations.

Quotation marks are used to mark dialogue, to indicate words that are borrowed, to emphasize certain details, and to help when giving credit for written works.

Using Quotation Marks to Signal Dialogue and Borrowed Words

Quotation marks are a key component of written dialogue. All words of a dialogue must be enclosed within quotation marks to indicate that these words are the exact words of the speaker.

“The one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience,” Atticus said.

When you talk about or summarize spoken words rather than presenting them as dialogue, you should not put quotation marks around them since you are not necessarily saying that they are the exact words the person said.

Jem once said that Boo’s dad was the meanest man alive.

As with dialogue, you also should use quotation marks to mark the exact words that you borrow from someone else.

About Harper Lee’s first interview since 1964, Paul Harris writes, “Lee has regularly turned down every interview request for decades but now, aged 79, has been tempted out of her shell by the University of Alabama.” Paul Harris, “Mockingbird Author Steps out of Shadows,” *The Observer*, Feb. 6, 2006.

An exception to using quotation marks around borrowed words is that lengthier quotations of others’ work (those of more than four lines of text) are set in indented

block format for the sake of easier readability. Also, if you paraphrase another's ideas in your words, you need to cite the source of the ideas, but you should not use quotation marks since the words are your own. For more on quoting and paraphrasing sources, see [Chapter 22 "Appendix B: A Guide to Research and Documentation"](#), [Section 22.2 "Integrating Sources"](#).

Use single quotation marks around a quotation within a quotation.

Example

According to Paul Harris, Lee “did have warm words about the screenplay of her book, which was turned into the hit film starring Gregory Peck in the 1960s. ‘I think it is one of the best translations of a book to film ever made,’ she said.” Paul Harris, “Mockingbird Author Steps out of Shadows,” *The Observer*, Feb. 6, 2006.

Using Quotation Marks to Enclose Titles of Short Works

Italics indicate titles of full-length books and other lengthy, completed works. To separate short works from these longer works, short works are enclosed in quotation marks rather than being placed in italics. Some examples of short works that should be included in quotation marks are articles in periodicals, book chapters or sections, essays, newspaper and magazine articles and reviews, short poems and stories, song titles, titles of television episodes, and titles of unpublished works, such as dissertations, papers, and theses.

Examples

Treatment for full-length books: I first read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in eighth grade.

Treatment for short works: In “A Child Shall Lead Them,” Michael Richardson suggests that Lee presents justice through the innocent eyes of a child in an effort to show its true form.

Using Quotation Marks to Identify Definitions

Using quotation marks is the accepted technique for identifying definitions that are used in running text.

Characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* visit the apothecary, which means “drugstore.”

Using Quotation Marks to Draw Attention to Words Used in a Special or Original Way

Quotation marks can help clarify that a word is being used in an unusual rather than in a straightforward manner. Without the quotation marks, readers might get a totally different meaning from a sentence.

- That course was really challenging.
- That course was really “challenging.” (Putting the word *challenging* in quotation marks lets us know that the sentence is probably using irony to say that the course was not challenging at all.)

If you create an original word to fit your specific needs, put the word in quotation marks to indicate to readers that the word is not a standard word.

Many accounts suggest that Harper Lee was very “Scout-like.”

Using Other Punctuation with Quotation Marks

It helps to know rules of using other punctuation marks in conjunction with quotation marks.

Rules

Rule: Put question marks and exclamation marks inside the quotation marks if the marks relate directly and only to the text within quotation marks. If, on the other hand, the marks relate to the whole sentence, put the marks outside the quotation marks.

Example 1: A girl in the back of the room asked, “What character did Robert Duvall play?”

Example 2: Did Mary Richards really “make it after all”?

Rule: Periods and commas always go inside the quotation marks, even if the quotation marks are only around the last word in the sentence.

Example 1: Scout asked Jem how old she was when their mother died, and Jem answered, “Two.”

Example 2: Even as an adult years later, Scout was likely to say that the summer of the trial lasted “forever,” due to the many life lessons she learned.

Rule: Place colons and semicolons outside quotation marks.

Example 1: I remember my first impression after reading Frost’s “Death of a Hired Man”: confusion.

Example 2: We had tickets to see the one-act play “Masks”; however, the blizzard hit just as we were trying to leave.

Guarding against Using Unneeded Quotation Marks

Special word usage, such as irony and made-up words, are placed in quotation marks. But do not use quotation marks just to make regular-use words stand out.

Example

When Jem met Dill, Jem said that Dill was awfully “puny.” (The word *puny* should not be put in quotation marks since it is a standard word being used with its straightforward meaning.)

If you choose to use slang or colloquialisms, do not give a sense that you are apologizing for the words by putting them inside quotation marks. Choose the slang words and colloquialisms you want to use and let them stand on their own.

Example

Calpurnia was very “down-to-earth.” (Do not put quotation marks around *down-to-earth*.)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Use quotation marks to identify exact words spoken words and words borrowed from another person.
- Use quotation marks with titles of short works, such as articles in periodicals, book chapters or sections, essays, newspaper and magazine articles and reviews, short poems and stories, song titles, titles of television episodes, and titles of unpublished works, such as dissertations, papers, and theses.
- Place quotation marks around definitions, words used in special ways, and words you make up to fill a particular need.
- Place all periods and commas inside of quotation marks.
- Place question marks and exclamation marks inside when they refer only to the content of the text inside the quotation marks and outside when they refer to the whole sentence.
- Place colons and semicolons outside quotation marks.

EXERCISE

1. Read each sentence. If a sentence should have quotation marks, add them in the correct place. If a sentence does not need quotation marks, write “no quotation marks.”
 - a. Oh, right, I forgot Shanda was too sick to go to work today. I saw her out shopping.
 - b. Doug asked, Were you in the gym when Ben broke his arm?
 - c. Ellen McPeck Glisan’s dissertation was entitled The Effect of Classmate Photographs on Online Community and Connectedness.
 - d. I wasn’t very happy when George said I was calm.
 - e. FDR showed his sense of humor when he said Be sincere; be brief; be seated.
 - f. You are very funny; remember that funny also means impertinent.
 - g. Annie said, I’ll see you at 5:00 p.m.
 - h. Keep in mind that I’m a sew-happy girl!

18.7 Incorporating Dashes and Parentheses

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learn the various uses for dashes.
2. Learn the various uses for parentheses.
3. Learn how to punctuate dashes and parentheses.

Dashes and parentheses are both used to give more importance to a word or group of words. The information enclosed by dashes and parentheses often supports the information directly before or after it.

Using Dashes

Dashes separate emphasis-adding text from the rest of the words in a sentence. You can use one long dash to set apart text at the end of a sentence. You can use dashes before and after the text to set it apart in the middle of a sentence. Here are some uses for dashes:

- Creating a sudden change in tone, thought, or ideas

Example: We had predicted that the storm would come soon—but not this soon!

- Suggesting hesitation in dialogue

Example: The old lady said to the man working the register, “I’ve got an extra nickel for the little girl’s candy—that is, if she’ll take it.”

- Providing a summary, an explanation, or an example

Example: The book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is narrated by Scout Finch—a character who has much in common with the tomboy childhood of the author, Harper Lee.

Using Parentheses

Parentheses allow you to interrupt the flow of your text to give additional information. They can be used in the middle of a sentence or at the end. Some uses of parentheses include the following:

- Enclosing numbers in an in-text list.

Example: My mother asked me to stop on the way to visit and pick a few things up at the store: (1) a half gallon of milk, (2) a dozen eggs, and (3) a loaf of bread.

- Setting apart citation components in in-text references and in reference lists.

Example: “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (Lee, p. 34).

- Separating nonessential but helpful information.

Example: My dog (some sort of a terrier-spaniel mix) has a unique personality.

Specific rules guide using punctuation with parentheses. End punctuation can be placed inside parentheses if the content of the parentheses is a complete sentence. If the content inside the parentheses is part of a larger sentence, the end punctuation should go outside the parentheses. If a comma is needed, it should always be placed outside the closing parenthesis. A comma should not be used immediately before an opening parenthesis, except in the case of in-text lists (e.g., “We need to (1) go to the bank, (2) buy some cereal at the store, (3) pick up the tickets, and (4) get to the party by 7:00 p.m.”)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- You can use dashes to create a sudden change in tone; mark hesitation in speech; or provide a summary, an explanation, or an example.
- You can use parentheses to number items in an in-text list, enclose citation components in in-text references and in reference lists, or separate nonessential but helpful information from the rest of the sentence.

EXERCISES

1. Write a sentence that uses a dash to show a change in tone.
2. Write a sentence that uses a dash to show hesitation in dialogue.
3. Write a sentence that uses a dash to provide an example.
4. Write a sentence that uses parentheses to enclose numbers in an in-text list.
5. Write a sentence that uses parentheses to set apart citation components.
6. Write a sentence that uses parentheses to separate nonessential but helpful information.

18.8 Choosing Correct End Punctuation

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Use periods correctly.
2. Use question marks correctly.
3. Use exclamation points correctly.

You have three choices for end punctuation: periods, question marks, and exclamation points. End punctuation gives readers information about how to read a sentence and how to interpret the sentence.

Using Periods

Periods have three main uses: punctuating many abbreviations, marking the end of many sentences, and separating components in reference citations.

Some abbreviations take periods all the time, while some never take periods. You simply have to learn the category of each abbreviation or look them up as you use them.

Examples

Examples of abbreviations that end in periods: approx., Ave., Dr., etc., Jr., Mrs., Univ.

Examples of abbreviations that do not include periods: LBJ, MLK, N/A, NV, TV, DVD, IBM, UK, USA, CEO, COD, RSVP

Periods end sentences that are not questions or exclamations, such as statements, commands, and requests.

- Statements

To Kill a Mockingbird is set in the early 1930s.

- Commands

Over the weekend, read the first four chapters.

- Requests

Please let me know at what parts of the book you get confused.

In reference citations, use periods to separate components. (For much more on documentation, see [Chapter 22 "Appendix B: A Guide to Research and Documentation"](#).)

Examples

MLA: Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002. Print.

OR

APA: Lee, H. (2002). *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: HarperCollins.

CMS: Lee, Harper. 2002. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: HarperCollins.

Using Question Marks

Question marks have one main use: to end sentences that ask direct questions. They are also sometimes used to indicate questions in a series.

- Question mark at the end of a sentence

Do you think Atticus encouraged Scout to be mature beyond her years, or do you think it just came naturally to Scout?

- Question marks in a series

We should go to the city council meeting with three basic questions: should the housing development be placed so close to the wildlife

preserve?, could a better location be found?, and how much time do we have to come up with alternatives?

When you choose to use a question mark at the end of a sentence, make sure the sentence is actually a sentence since some sentences give a sense of being a question when they are not. Such sentences are called **indirect questions**¹⁴.

Example

Jem asked Scout what she was thinking?

Correction: Jem asked Scout what she was thinking.

Using Exclamation Points

Exclamation points are a method of showing surprise or strong emotions in writing. To preserve the impact of an exclamation point, you should use them sparingly. Besides lessening their impact, the use of too many exclamation points is distracting for readers.

Examples

Overuse of exclamation points: This course has been very engaging! There's never been a dull moment! The instructor has always been very helpful! She's always there when you need her!

Proper use of exclamation points: The national debt stacked in dollar bills would be high enough to reach the moon—and back!

14. A sentence that gives the sense of being a question when it really is not a question.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Use periods to punctuate many abbreviations; to end sentences that are statements, commands, and requests; and to separate components of a reference citation.
- Use question marks to end sentences that ask direct questions or to indicate questions in a series. Do not use question marks to end indirect questions or to show irony or sarcasm (except in casual situations).
- Use exclamation points sparingly as a means of showing surprise or strong emotions.

EXERCISE

1. Write two sentences in the following categories with different, but appropriate, end punctuation:
 - a. a declarative statement
 - b. a command
 - c. a request
 - d. a question
 - e. a statement showing surprise, emotion, or emphasis

18.9 Knowing When to Use Hyphens

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize compound words that require hyphens all the time and those that require hyphens due to specific situations.
2. Learn how to use hyphens in writing numbers.
3. Learn which prefixes and suffixes require the use of a hyphen.

Some hyphen usage rules are set requirements, such as in certain compound words and fractions and numbers. Other hyphen usage rules are subjective or situation-specific, such as with certain compound words, prefixes, confusing situations, and continuations to the next line of text.

Using Hyphens with Compound Words

Some standing compound words are written with hyphens, some as one word without a hyphen, and some as two words without a hyphen.

Examples

Examples of compound words that are written with hyphens: merry-go-round, over-the-counter, six-year-old, son-in-law

Examples of compound words that are written as one word with no hyphen: drywall, firefly, softball, toothpaste

Examples of compound words that are written as two separate words without a hyphen: high school, middle class, peanut butter, post office

Other rules for hyphens in compound words include the following:

- Hyphenate compound words when they are used together to modify the same word (e.g., “Scout was a quick-witted child”).

- Do not turn words into a hyphenated compound adjective if words are placed after the word they modify (e.g., “Scout was a child who was quick witted”).
- Do not hyphenate *-ly* adverbs and adjectives (e.g., “Georgie has a highly coveted first-run copy,” not “Georgie has a **highly-coveted** first-run copy”).

Using Hyphens to Write Fractions and Numbers

Fractions and numbers are actually compound words and as such, could be included in [Section 18.9.1 "Using Hyphens with Compound Words"](#). But just to be clear, let’s review them briefly here.

Use hyphens to write all two-word numbers between twenty-one and ninety-nine. Also, use hyphens when writing those numbers within larger numbers. Hyphenate a fraction you are expressing as a single quantity, regardless of whether you are using it as a noun or as an adjective.

Examples

- twenty-one
- four hundred twenty-one
- two-thirds of the pie
- a one-quarter share of the profits

Using Hyphens with Prefixes and Suffixes

Use hyphens in certain situations to add prefixes and suffixes to words.

- To join a capitalized word to a prefix
anti-American
post-Renaissance
- To join a number to a prefix
pre-1960

- To join a single capital letter to a word

A-team

T-shirt

- To join the prefixes *all-*, *ex-*, *quasi-*, and *self-* to words

ex-neighbor

self-aware

- To join the suffixes *-elect*, *-odd*, and *-something* to words

president-elect

fifty-odd

Using Hyphens to Avoid Confusion

Sometimes a hyphen can separate two visually alike words from each other. Consider that the use of the hyphen in the first of the following two sentences helps to avoid confusion that would be generated without the hyphen.

- I think the assistant prosecutor should re-sign.
- I think the assistant prosecutor should resign.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Some compound words are always in compound form and some are hyphenated. Writers create other hyphenated compound words for situational needs when two or more words modify the same word and are placed before that word in a sentence.
- Hyphens are used to separate the words in the numbers twenty-one through ninety-nine and in fractions.
- You should use a hyphen when adding prefixes to proper nouns or numbers. Also, use a hyphen to join a capital letter to a word and to join certain prefixes (*all-*, *ex-*, *quasi-*, and *self-*) and suffixes (*-elect*, *-odd*, and *-something*).

EXERCISES

1. Try these exercises without using any words that were given as examples in this section.
 - a. Make a list of ten compound words that are always written with hyphens.
 - b. Write two sentences that include situational compound adjectives that modify nouns.
2. Write these numbers in words: 42, 89, 265, 1725.
3. Write these fractions in words: $\frac{3}{4}$, $7\frac{1}{2}$.
4. Write three words that each use one of these prefixes and suffixes: *all-*, *ex-*, *quasi-*, *-self*, *-elect*, *-odd*, *-something*.