

# Punctuation 101



**HOW TO GET IT RIGHT MOST OF THE TIME  
(UNLESS YOU'RE BRITISH)**

Two nations...



...divided by a common language.

# Rules vs Style



**Rules!**



*Style*



# Style Guides

## Examples



American Medical Association (AMA)

American Psychological Association (APA)

Council of Science Editors (CSE)

American Chemical Society (ACS)

Associated Press (AP)

Chicago Manual of Style



US Government Printing Office

Fowler's Modern English Usage

Oxford Guide to English Usage



Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*

Journals

Institutions (e.g. CDC)

Newspapers, magazines

Web sites

# Periods



- Use to end a sentence
- Abbreviations
  - Academic degrees (periods, no spaces)
    - ✦ Ph.D., M.D., B.Ch.E
  - Geographic terms (*usually* periods, no spaces)
    - ✦ U.S.A., L.A., R.S.A.
  - Abbreviated titles
    - ✦ Mr., Mrs., Dr.
  - Acronyms (no periods)
    - ✦ Formal organizations/titles: NASA, NFL, IRS
    - ✦ CDC acronyms: MMC, PMTCT
    - ✦ Web: IMHO, LOL

# Periods



How many spaces do you type after a period?

1 2

Font  
types



The two-space rule became standard with the invention of the typewriter, which used a monospace font. Monospace fonts had lots of empty space between letters (picture an *i* or an *l* in the monospace example above), so two spaces after periods made it clearer that a sentence had ended. Modern computers use proportional fonts, and modern typesetting uses one space after a period.

# Commas



- Perhaps the most misused of all punctuation marks (in part because they are the most used).
- Commas do have some rules, but these rules can often be broken (sometimes).
- Commas are also subject to style guidelines and the *How-Does-It-Sound* doctrine.

*So how should I used them? Here we go ...*

# How to use commas



- To replace the word *and* between words:  
The Pirates signed a big **and** strong **and** fast forward.  
The Pirates signed a big, strong, fast forward.
- To set out a proper name or title:  
Excuse me, **Sam**, you dropped something.  
Yes, **Doctor**, I will call you in the morning.
- When writing dates (after day, date and year):  
I came to CDC SA on Monday, July 30, 2013, for a TDY.

If any part of the date is omitted, leave out the comma:

*I came to CDC SA in July 2013 for a TDY.*



# How to use commas



- To separate items in a series:

No Oxford or serial comma (a matter of preference or style)



We will provide tables, chairs and linens for the wedding.

We support prevention of mother-to-child transmission, medical male circumcision, and HIV counseling and testing services.



Oxford (serial) comma included for clarity because of the extra *and* in the series, even if you typically do not use a serial comma.

# How to use commas



- To connect two independent clauses separated by a *small* (coordinating) conjunction:



He kicked the ball sharply, but it hit the goalpost.

He kicked the ball sharply but wide.

Conjunction does not separate two independent clauses, so no comma.

He did not score because the ball hit the goalpost.

Not a small conjunction, so *perhaps* no comma.

She arrived and I left.

No comma is necessary when *both* clauses are short.

# How to use commas



- Never place the comma after the conjunction:

~~He kicked the ball sharply but, it hit the goalpost.~~

~~I will vote by absentee ballot or, maybe I won't.~~

# How to use commas



- To set off parenthetical elements (added information):

Nelson Mandela, the first black South African to be elected President, was born in 1918.

Jackie Perdue, my mother, was born in 1932.

Some parenthetical elements will be better served with an em dash instead. More on that in a bit...

# How to use commas



- To set off introductory elements...

Established in 2003, PEPFAR now operates in more than 50 countries around the world.

Never having won the rugby World Cup, Ireland's fans are ready for 2015.

- ...unless they are brief or clear without it.

Today I am going for a run.

# How to use commas



- To separate city and state.

Place a comma after the state if it is written out but not if you are using the 2-letter postal code.

I lived in the town of Chester, Virginia, for 24 years.

I lived in the town of Chester, VA for 24 years.

- To separate *i.e.* and *e.g.*

I need office supplies, *e.g.*, pencils, pens and paper.

[www.grammarbook.com/punctuation](http://www.grammarbook.com/punctuation)

# I.e. vs E.g.



E.g. = *Exempli Gratia* = for example, such as

I.e. = *Id Est* = that is, in other words, namely

E.g. = for *eg*xample

I.e. = *i*n other words

I am going to visit my favorite pub, *i.e.*, Dogwood Tavern.

Dogwood Tavern has many styles of beer, *e.g.*, lagers, stouts and ales.

# Exclamation Points



**Don't use them!**





# Dashes and Hyphens



Mark		PC	Mac	What's it for?	Examples
Hyphen	-	Hyphen	Hyphen	Compound words Some prefixes Compound adjectives	Mother-in-law Pre-meeting Well-deserved
En dash	–	Alt-hyphen	Option-hyphen	Used to indicate a range (pages, dates, scores)  Used to hyphenate an already hyphenated term	Orlando won 3–1.  I will be out of the office June 5–7.  I have an in-law–based headache.
Em dash	—	Alt-shift-hyphen  Or double hyphen	Option-shift-hyphen	Marks an interruption in a sentence (an aside, a change in direction)  Marks an interruption in a statement  Quote attribution	Two winners—Sue and Nancy—were announced.  Robert won—or did he?  What the—  — Winston Churchill

# Quotation Marks



Style Issue	American Style 	British Style 
To indicate a quotation, use ...	Double quotation marks	Single quotation marks
To indicate a quote within a quote, use ...	Single quotation marks	Double quotation marks
Place periods and commas ...	Inside quotation marks	Outside quotation marks
Place other punctuation marks ...	Outside quotation marks (unless punctuation is part of what's being quoted)	

The presence of American and British styles has also led to all sorts of hybrid styles, so don't get confused if you see something different.

# Quotation Marks

(North American Style)



Punctuation Mark	In relation to closing quotation mark*	Examples
Period	Inside	Reviewers found the film to be “action-packed.” Bob said, “Despite what Joe said, the film wasn’t ‘fun.’”
Comma	Inside	Reviewers found the film to be “intelligent,” “fun,” and “action-packed.”
Semicolon	Outside	The film wasn’t “intelligent”; it was juvenile.
Colon	Outside	The reviewer deemed the following films “fun”: <i>Men in Black</i> , <i>Captain America</i> and <i>The Commitments</i> .
? or ! (not part of quoted material)	Outside	Who said, “I think therefore I am”? I am excited to see “Star Wars Episode 7”!
? or ! (part of quoted material)	Inside	I asked my nephew, “Did you hit your sister?” I remember laughing at the movie, “Airplane!” “When do you arrive?” he asked.

**Note:** You only use one punctuation mark around a quote, and the strongest mark wins.

# Quotation Marks



- Introduce short quotes with a comma and long quotes with a colon

John said, “Let’s go.”

John said: “Let’s go. If we stay here much longer we will get stuck in traffic, and I don’t want to be late.”

- Do not use “scare” quotes in most writing.

In American government, Barrack Obama is the “president” of the country.

Travel is restricted because we are worried about the “optics.”

# Quotation Marks



- Do not use quotes to introduce every new word or term.

Researchers are searching for new antimicrobial peptides for treating Gram-negative bacterial infections.

- Do not use quotes to mean you are talking about a word as a term; use italics. Use quotes for the definition.

*Boisterous* and *rambunctious* are synonyms meaning “overflowing with difficult-to-control activity or enthusiasm.”

# Aldus Manutius (the Elder)



Born: 1449

Died: 1515

Founded Aldine Press at Venice, 1494

Invented italic type

Established the modern the semicolon

Devised modern appearance of the comma

Introduced small-format, paperback-like books.

# When to use semicolons



- To separate two independent clauses NOT separated by a conjunction:
  - He kicked the ball sharply; it hit the upright.
  - I am late for work; my driver is not here yet.
- Before words like *namely*, *for example*, *i.e.*, *e.g.*, *that is*, *for instance*, *however*, and *therefore* when they introduce a clause:
  - We will need many supplies; for example, pens, paper, pencils and scissors will make our jobs easier.

You may use either a comma or semicolon if the linking word introduces a series.

# When to use semicolons



- To separate items in a series when  $\geq 1$  of those items contains a comma:

I most recently visited Windhoek, Namibia; Cape Town, South Africa; and Kasane, Botswana.

- Before a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or) between two clauses when  $\geq 1$  commas appear in the first clause:

If I can get off work, I will be there; and she will be there, too, if she can do the same.



# Colons



- Colons are easy. They introduce things in the absence of introductory words.

The groom forgot the most important thing: the ring.

- So, do not place a colon after a verb, even when it introduces something.

My favorite subjects in high school were biology, English and music.

- Do not place a colon before or after an introductory term such as namely, that is or for example.

The groom forgot the most important thing, that is, the ring.

# Colons



- Sometimes colons can also emphasize things:

The Denver Broncos beat their opponents in the key area of passing offense.

The Denver Broncos outdo their opponents in one key area: passing offense.

- Use a colon between two clauses if the second clause illustrates the first AND there is no coordinating conjunction between them.

I enjoy wine: my favorite varietal is pinot noir.

I enjoy wine: My favorite varietal is pinot noir. It can be made in so many styles.

Some style guides say one space after a colon, others say two.

Some style guides say capitalize any complete sentence following a colon.

# Ellipsis

(“dot dot dot”)



Location of omission in sentence	Punctuation	Example
Middle	[space]-ellipsis-[space]	<i>“We hope to play well and win the game so we can move up in the standings. Time is running out.”</i>
End	[space]-ellipsis-[space]-period	We hope to play well ... so we can move up in the standings. Time is running out.
After	Period-[space]-ellipsis (or no ellipsis at all)	We hope to play well and win the game so we can move up in the standings. ...

# Apostrophes



- Do not use an apostrophe for the plural of a name (unless it already ends in s):

The Perdues came to the United States in the 1600s.

The Jones's live next door.

- When you have two names you wish to make possessive:

Use an apostrophe after both if they possess separate items:

I like David's and Sarah's paintings.

I fed David's and Sarah's dogs. (David and Sarah have their own dogs.)

Use an apostrophe after the last if they share the item(s):

I visited Mary and John's home.

I fed Mary and John's dogs. (Mary and John share two dogs.)

# Apostrophes



- **It's vs its**

It's = "it is" or "it has" (so no reason to ever use *it's* in formal writing)

*It's* about time we learned the difference between *it's* and *its*.

Its = "belongs to it" (possessive of *it*)

The lion stalked *its* prey.

- Do not use apostrophes for capital letters and numbers used as plural nouns (unless showing plural possessive)

I am surrounded by Ph.D.s.

I took the Ph.D.s' photos.

I was born in the 1960s.

# How to punctuate around parentheses



- Periods, question marks, exclamation points
  - Inside parentheses if they enclose an entire sentence.

Please refer to the video evidence. (It is labeled *Exhibit A*.)
  - Outside parentheses if they do not.

Please refer to the video evidence (Exhibit A).
- Commas, colons, semicolons
  - Outside parentheses

Boston has had recent national champions in American football (Patriots), baseball (Red Sox), and basketball (Celtics).

# Who vs Whom



Subjective	Objective	Possessive
I	me	mine
you	you	yours
he/she/it	him/her/it	his/her/hers/its
we	us	ours
they	them	their/theirs
who	whom	whose

Use *who* when you would say “he.”

Use *whom* when you would say “him.”

If neither work, turn the sentence around and try again.

*You punched who? or You punched whom?*

You would say, “You punched him,” not “You punched he.”  
So the answer is: *You punched whom?*

# Who, That, Which



- *Who* refers to people.

Joan is the one **who** baked the cookies.

I cannot trust a man **who** cheats on his taxes.

- *That* introduces essential clauses.

The company **that** makes the bicycles is in my hometown.

I could never buy a car **that** gets poor gas mileage.

- *Which* introduces non-essential clauses.

The article, **which** was written last week, appeared in today's paper.

Some writers (esp. in the UK) will use *which* restrictively, without the commas.