**Punctuation**

Punctuation in writing indicates pauses, gestures, and desired changes of expression.

Punctuation keeps words from running together so the meaning is clear. There are a lot of

punctuation marks:

**1. Period .**

**\* End Punctuation**

A **period** at the end of a sentence serves the same purpose as a stop sign. It brings you to a

halt. The period marks the end of

- A **declarative sentence** (a statement of fact)

**- An imperative sentence** (a command or request for someone to do something).

- Every sentence that is a statement should end with a period.

**Eg:** He sells most of his photos online. (declarative sentence)

Please schedule a meeting for next Monday. (imperative sentence)

Periods are used in many **abbreviations** (shortened forms of words or groups of words), but

most abbreviations are not commonly used in formal writing. Some abbreviations are always

acceptable.

**\* Initials and Titles**

Use a period after an initial and after the courtesy titles Mr., Mrs., and Ms.

**Eg:** The keynote speaker is Ms. A. G. Scott. (Note there should be a space between a first and

a middle initial.)

Most professional titles are spelled out. An exception is Dr.

**Eg:** Dr. Johnson volunteers for Doctors Without Borders.

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A professional title can be abbreviated if the person’s full name is used.

Lt. Bryan Sackenheim has returned from a six-month Western Pacific deployment.

**\* Degrees and Professional Designations**

Use periods in academic degrees that follow a person’s name.

**Eg:** Dilip Shah, R.N., has joined the staff of Metro Hospital.

A degree such as M.D., J.D., Ph.D., or D.D.S. is a doctoral degree. Do not use Dr. and a

doctoral degree together.

**Eg:** Dr. Vincent Getchell, M.D., will serve as an expert witness. (incorrect)

Dr. Vincent Getchell **or** Vincent Getchell, M.D. (correct)

Within the health care field, medical degrees are often written without periods.

Professional designations such as CPA (certified public accountant) are written without

periods when used alone but with periods when used with academic degrees.

**Eg :** Federico Morales, CLU, will speak on investment planning.

**\* Time and State Names**

Use periods with a.m. and p.m. to designate time. Use the United States Postal Service

state abbreviations (two capital letters, no periods) in letter addresses.

**Eg:** Did Herschel take the 9:30 a.m. flight?

Newark, NJ

**\* Company Names**

Abbreviations are sometimes part of a company’s official name. Abbreviations people

commonly use for some organizations’ names have become official names.

**Eg:** Pier 1 Imports, Inc.

UPS

**2. Question Mark ?**

A **question mark**, like a period, is used as a full stop in punctuation. A question mark is

used after an **interrogative sentence**. These sentences ask direct questions.

**Eg:** Where is the subway station? Did he start his clinical internship?

**3. Exclamation Point !**

An **exclamation point** is used after words, phrases, or sentences to express sudden

emotion (joy, fear, pain, happiness, anger) and forceful commands.

Reserve them to express truly strong feeling.

**Eg:** I can’t believe it! Congratulations! Help! Ouch! Watch out!

**4. Comma**

The **comma** is similar to a traffic warning sign. When you want to make a turn while you

are driving, you signal and then turn. In writing, if you want to change your thoughts, insert

some other ideas, or identify parts, you use the comma. Often, the sound of the spoken

sentence with a pause and change of voice pitch will serve as a guide in the placement of

commas in writing. Commas clarify the meaning of your sentences. They show you where

one word or group of words ends and the next word or group of words begins.

**\* Series**

Commas separate three or more items in series. Notice how these sentences are read

without commas, and then see how they sound with commas.

**Eg:** Carlo Nellie and Genevieve went skiing.

Carlo, Nellie, and Genevieve went skiing.

**\* Introductory Words, Phrases, and Clauses**

Introductory words and phrases are separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma.

(An exception is then.)

**Eg:** Unfortunately, neither of us will be able to attend the conference.

A comma is also used after a dependent clause that precedes a main clause at the beginning of

a sentence. The comma sets off the independent (main) clause.

**Eg:** While Keelan was in Salt Lake City, he visited the Clark Planetarium.

The slight pause indicated by the comma prevents reading words together. If it is omitted

or misplaced, the sentence may be confusing, or its meaning may change.

**Eg:** Inside the house was in complete disarray.

Inside, the house was in complete disarray.

**\* Nonessential Elements**

Use commas to set off **nonessential elements**—words, phrases, and clauses that could be

left out of a sentence without affecting its structure (it would still be a sentence) or meaning.

In speaking, you would pause before and after these words, phrases, and clauses.

**\*Independent Clauses**

A comma is used before a coordinating conjunction such as and, but, or, nor, or yet when

it links independent (main) clauses. The comma may be omitted if the two clauses are short or

closely related in subject matter.

**Eg:**He failed the test and he didn’t care.

Mitch made a vegetable stew with polenta, and Fatima brought apple cobbler.

**\* Independent Adjectives Before a Noun**

Independent adjectives before a noun should be separated by a comma.

**Eg:** It was a cool, windy day. Can you get lush, green grass if you use an organic fertilizer?

**\* Quotations**

**Quotations** (direct speech) are set off by commas from the rest of the sentence.

**Eg:** “Success is more permanent when you achieve it without destroying your principles,”

said Walter Cronkite.

Do not use commas when the quotation fits smoothly into the sentence.

**Eg:** Dave Barry wrote that doing your own car repairs is “an easy way to save money and

possibly maim yourself for life.”

**\* Dates, Addresses, and Letters**

The comma is used to set off the second and all following items in complete dates and in

addresses.

**Eg:** Layne’s grandmother was born on June 28, 1942, in Scotland.

No comma is needed when the date has only two parts or uses the word of.

**Eg:** My sister graduated from college in June 2008.

The wedding will take place on the ninth of September.

In a letter, a comma is used after the complimentary close if a colon has been used after the

situation.

**Eg:** Dear Mrs. West: Sincerely yours,

**\* States and Countries**

Use commas to set off the name of a state or country that follows the name of a city.

**Eg:** Dwight grew up in Baltimore, Maryland.

Jordi was transferred from Oslo, Norway, to Bern, Switzerland.

**\* Numbers**

For numbers greater than zero, use a comma to separate the digits into groups of three. Do

not use a comma in parts of a number that are less than zero (decimals) and years.

36,108 residents $2,456,000 5,028,358,721 chips

**But** 1,569.0184543 the year 1934

**5. Semicolon ;**

The **semicolon** is used to separate independent clauses when they are not joined by a

coordinating conjunction. It is used as a “slow down” signal, stronger than a comma but not a

complete stop. You can remove a semicolon and put a period in its place, and you will have

two complete sentences instead of one.

**Eg:** The tuition for my multimedia course is $795; the books and software cost $210.

Osahon will pick us up at 7; the play starts at 8.

The semicolon is used between independent clauses when they are joined by a

**conjunctive adverb** (an adverb that connects and relates main clauses, such as besides,

however, nevertheless, still, then, and therefore). When phrases like as a result, for example,

or for instance connect and relate main clauses, the semicolon is used, too.

**Eg:** The plane was late departing; however, we arrived on time due to a strong tailwind.

**6. Colon :**

The **colon** is used to direct the reader’s attention to what comes after it, usually a list. The

colon often is used after words like the following or as follows.

**Eg:** The following employees have completed 35 years of service: Jamie Dell, Devin Lace,

and Ilana Wood.

Trevor enrolled in three business courses: international business, marketing, and

financial accounting.

The colon is always preceded by an independent clause, except when the listed items are

on separate lines. Use the colon between the hour and the minutes in writing times.

**Eg:** Our customer service center is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

A colon may be used after the salutation in a letter. (A comma must then be used after the

complimentary close.)

Eg: Dear Mr. and Mrs. Sutterman: Sincerely,

**7.Dash —**

The **dash** is most often used in place of commas, parentheses, a colon, or a semicolon

when special emphasis is desired.

**Eg:** Bobby Or — one of the greatest players of all time—started with the Boston Bruins at the

age of 18.

The plan has just one drawback—it doesn’t set a cap on expenditures.

The dash is also used when a sentence is interrupted abruptly and a different thought is added.

**Eg:** That’s Susannah’s brother—didn’t he work for President Clinton?

**8. Parentheses ( )**

**Parentheses** are used to set off additions that are not necessary to the meaning of a

sentence. Unlike the dash, parentheses tend to de-emphasize what they set off . Parentheses

are used to enclose explanations, references, directions, and numbers and letters of listed

items.

**Eg:** Doing some type of exercise daily (swimming, aerobics, or running) has improved her

health.

According to your letter of August 15 (copy enclosed), I have fulfilled my distribution

requirements.

Please (1) read the proposal carefully, (2) discuss it with your team, and (3) send me an

analysis by Monday.