

Basic Punctuation Rules

Punctuation can make an enormous difference in the meaning of whatever it is you're writing. Consider the following classic examples of the change in meaning that punctuation can communicate:

eats shoots and leaves
eats, shoots, and leaves

Let's eat, Grandma!
Let's eat Grandma!

Woman, without her man, is nothing.
Woman! Without her, man is nothing.

Let's face it: proper punctuation can make or break the impact of an otherwise well-constructed sentence. These basic rules can strengthen your sentences with the punctuation they deserve, so that the quality of your ideas is communicated with precision and clarity.

commas

Commas are used to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses (sentence parts) in a series.

Commas are used after an introductory dependent clause (a group of words before the subject of a sentence that do not form a complete sentence).

Commas indicate that introductory words and phrases moved from the end of the sentence.

Commas are used between independent clauses (complete sentences) joined by a coordinating conjunction: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

Commas set off nonessential phrases or clauses (phrases that can be removed without changing the sentence's overall meaning) or appositives (words or phrases that rename a noun).

Commas separate paired adjectives that describe a noun. You need a comma between adjectives that could go in any order—they're not cumulative and could be separated by the word "and." Do not use a comma between adjectives that need to be in a particular order.

The entree includes ~~potatoes, carrots,~~ and a ~~broccoli.~~

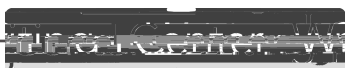
~~After we had dinner,~~ we stayed to watch the sunset.

~~When we got to the beach,~~ everything looked different.

My family went to see the live taping of Ru Paul's *Drag Race*, ~~so~~ I stayed home with the flu.

My cousin, ~~the one who lives in the city,~~ said it would be best if I skipped town for awhile.

- ✗ They always have ~~potatoes, carrots,~~ meat.
- ✓ They always have ~~potatoes,~~ meat.
- ✗ They always have ~~potatoes,~~ meat.
- ✓ They always have ~~potatoes,~~ meat.



Jenny's book any. 's guess
some . 's laptop the waltz's tempo

my . ' car
the . ' instruments

yours, his, hers, ours, theirs, whose, its

I am = I'm cannot = can't they are = they're
I have = I've let us = C mmmmm hio used to

hyphens

Hyphens are used to form compound words or join word units. They are also used to join prefixes, suffixes, and letters to words.

Use hyphens with compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine and with fractions used as modifiers (adjectives).

Use hyphens in a compound adjective only when it comes before the word it modifies. There are exceptions; look up compound adjectives in the dictionary if you are unsure whether or not to hyphenate them.

Use a hyphen with the prefixes ex-, self-, and all-; with the suffix elect-; and with all prefixes before a proper noun or proper adjective.

Use a hyphen with compound phrases. Note: When describing ages, phrases that function as adjectives will use hyphens, while numbers as adjectives will not use hyphens.

Also, note how hyphens can change meaning, and use them accordingly.

three hundred students
three thousand five hundred and . students
two thirds majority (vs. "two thirds of the voters")

a . author
an author who is well liked
a . composer
a composer who is world renowned

ex- star -mayor . -choice
ex- -image . -European senator- .

the . - boy he is nine years old
sister-in-law all-or-nothing
up-to-date soon-to-be

a . - bottle (a bottle for holding hot water)
a hot water bottle (a bottle of water that is hot)
to . - a shirt (to iron again)
to repress bad memories (to keep at bay)

Semicolons join two independent clauses (complete sentences) that are closely related if no coordinating conjunction is used.

Megan said she was tired; she had stayed up late cutting giraffe-shaped holes out of foreign newspapers.

We were planning to go get coffee; however, he had to cancel.

She traveled to **B** and

