

Punctuation Quick Guide

1. What is a comma splice?

A comma splice is when two independent clauses are connected solely by a comma. In English, we cannot use just a comma to connect two independent clauses.

Example:

- They made dinner last night, we had so much food to eat.

How can I fix this?

- Use a semi-colon: They made dinner last **night**; we had so much food to eat.
- Use a conjunction: They made dinner last night, **and** we had so much food to eat.
- Separate with a period: They made dinner last night. **We** had so much food to eat.
- Use subordination (since, although, even though, because, when). **Since** they made dinner last night, we had so much food to eat.

2. What is a Run-on?

A run-on is two complete thoughts that run together with no punctuation to show the break between them.

Example:

- I went to the bank I forgot my identification.

How can I fix this?

- Use a semi-colon: I went to the **bank**; I forgot my identification
- Use a comma and conjunction: I went to the bank, **but** I forgot my identification.
- Separate with a period: I went to the bank. **I** forgot my identification.
- Use subordination (since, although, even though, because, when). **Even though** I went to the **bank**, I forgot my identification.

3. What is a fragment?

A fragment is when we have a sentence that is incomplete. It does not have a proper subject and verb relation or usage. We can fix these, occasionally, by adding a comma to connect two separate fragments.

Example:

- We need a lot of ingredients for the cook-off. For example, buns, burgers, and ketchup.

How can I fix this?

- Connect the two sentences together: We need a lot of ingredients for the cook-off, **for example**, buns, burgers, and ketchup.

Periods & Ellipsis

When should I use a period?

Here are some common examples of when periods should be used.

1. **Use a period to end all sentences. When using a quotation and a parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence, put the period after the parenthetical citation.**

Examples:

- The black chairs were stacked against the **wall**.

2. **A period is used in abbreviations.**

Examples:

- Mr. i.e. a.m. (or AM)
- Ms. e.g. p.m. (or PM)
- Dr. etc.

3. **If a sentence ends with a period marking an abbreviation, do not add a second period.**

Example:

- We have burgers, sausages, steak, chicken, **etc**.

4. **Do not use a period for state abbreviations.**

Examples:

- NV, CA, AZ

5. **Do not use periods for abbreviations of organization names, academic degrees, and designations of eras.**

Examples:

- CSN UNLV BS BC UNESCO

When should I use an ellipsis?

Here are some common examples of when an ellipsis should be used.

1. **The ellipsis mark consists of three spaced periods. Use an ellipsis mark to indicate that you have deleted material from an otherwise word-for-word quotation.**

Example:

- Smith writes that, "There are a number of measures you can take to decrease your risk of having a heart attack . . . **but** this new medication provides a safe alternative" ("Side Effects of Medications").

2. **If you delete a full sentence or more in the middle of a quoted passage, use a period before the three ellipsis dots.**

Example:

- "Most of our efforts," one study explains, "are directed toward preserving the beautiful coastline from unsafe toxic waste **disposal**. . . **It's** important that we receive more funding for this project to preserve the beaches for future generations " (Cartwright 43).
- NOTE: Do not use the ellipsis mark at the beginning or end of a quote.

Commas

When should I use commas?

Here are some common examples of when commas should be used.

1. **Before a conjunction** - Use commas before a conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) to connect two independent clauses.

Examples:

- We wanted to go to the park, **but** it was raining.
- I like to be comfortable, **so** I wear sweatpants indoors.

2. **Setting off an introductory phrase** - Use commas after an introductory phrase or clause.

Examples:

- When Bob arrives at the **house**, we will go to the show.
- **However**, the study is still inconclusive.
- With the snow falling **relentlessly**, we went home early.

3. **In a list** - Use commas between every item in a list

Examples:

- The papers that still need to be graded are **Joe's, John's**, and Jasmine's.
- She went to the store and bought **eggs, milk**, and bread.

4. **Set off quoted elements** - Use commas to set off quotes in a sentence.

Examples:

- George writes in his **article**, "students are continually pursuing higher education."
- "The question is," **said Alex**, "when are we going out?"

5. **To set off non-essential phrases** - Use commas to set off non-essential phrases. These are phrases that can be removed without affecting the meaning of the sentence.

Examples:

- Her partner, **Lily**, is hosting the dinner party.
- Yousef, **the new professor**, will be at the faculty meeting.

6. **To separate two or more adjectives** – Use commas to separate adjectives that describe the same noun in place of 'and'.

Examples:

- The **small, brown, fluffy** dog did cute tricks in that video.
- The **old, creaky, decrepit** house was said to be haunted.

Apostrophes

When should I use apostrophes?

Here are some common examples of when apostrophes should be used.

1. **Possession** - Use apostrophes to show that somebody owns something.

a) If the word is **singular** (even if it ends in "s"), add **'s**

Example:

- **Doris's** bag.
- The **dog's** bowl.

b) If the word is **plural**, add **'s**

Example:

- **Cattle's** horns.
- The **children's** toys.

c) If the word is **plural and ends in s**, add **'**

Example:

- **Workers'** rights.
- The **Thompsons'** car.

d) If the word is a **compound word**, add **'s**

Example:

- **Father-in-law's** birthday.

e) If **joint possession**, add **'s** to the last listed person.

Example:

- Bob and **Susan's** house.

2. **Contractions** - A contraction is often used in informal writing where one or more letters or numbers have been removed for convenience. The apostrophe is placed where these letters or numbers have been removed.

- Note: Most formal papers do NOT allow contractions, so you should avoid using them where possible.

Examples:

- **It's** (it is)
- **We're** (we are)
- **They're** (they are)
- **Don't** (do not)
- **Can't** (can not)
- **I'm** (I am)
- **We'll** (We will)
- **Let's** (Let us)
- **Shouldn't** (Should not)
- **Couldn't** (Could not)
- **Didn't** (did not)

Semicolons & Colons

When should I use a semicolon?

Here are some common examples of when semicolon should be used.

1. **To join independent clauses** – Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses, where a period would be too conclusive.

Examples:

- The yellow kitten is **adorable**; it has white stripes along its tail.
- The days were **long**; they were hot and the work was hard.

2. **Before words like *however* and *therefore*** – Use semicolons before words or phrases like *however*, *therefore*, *thus*, *for example*, and *namely*, when the word or phrase introduces an independent clause.

Examples:

- These examples are persuasive; **however**, the study is ultimately inconclusive.
- I really like cheesecake; **therefore**, I suggest we save room for dessert.

3. **In a complex list** - Use semicolons as super commas, when a list contains other punctuation.

Examples:

- I have been to Boston, Maine, and New York in the **North**; Tennessee, Atlanta, and Mobile in the **South**; and Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Arizona in the West.
- The guests at dinner will be Jean-Luc, the chairperson of the **company**; Deanna, the founder and **CFO**; Dr. Beverly Crusher, the head of research (the newest member of the **company**); and William Riker, who manages advertising.

When should I use colons?

Here are some common examples of when colons should be used.

1. **A colon is used to set off a list or quotation.**

Example:

- When you go out you should get these four **items**: milk, bread, cookies, and vegetables.
- Consider Eleanor Roosevelt's **quote**: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

2. **A colon is used with an appositive (a noun or pronoun beside another noun that explains it further).**

Example:

- Two of the Wonders of the World include the following places: The Great Pyramids and the Hanging Gardens.

3. **Use a colon to indicate hours and minutes, to show proportions, between a title and subtitle, and between city and publisher in bibliographic entries.**

Examples:

- **4:30**
- The ratio of women to men is **2:1**
- *The Glory of **Hera**: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family*
- **Boston**: Bedford, 2005

Punctuation in Quotations

How should I use punctuation with quotations?

Here are some common examples of how punctuation should be used with quotations.

1. **If a quotation contains a quote, what should I do?** – If a quote contains a subordinate quote, alter the punctuation around the subordinate quote to a single quotation mark.

Example:

- The head researcher indicated that, “When asked about their experience, subjects indicated that they felt, ‘**healthy**, happy, and excited about participating in further **programs.**”

2. **Brackets** – Use brackets to indicate where you have added helpful information to quotations.

Example:

- The head researcher indicated that, “When [**Dr. Smith**] asked about their experience, subjects indicated that they felt, ‘healthy, happy, and excited about participating in further programs.’”

3. **What should I do if a quote requires a parenthetical citation and ends in nonstandard punctuation?** – If a quote ends in an exclamation point, a question mark, or other nonstandard punctuation, leave the punctuation intact and add a period after the citation.

Example:

- The head researcher indicated that, “When asked about their experience, subjects indicated that they felt, ‘healthy, happy, and excited about participating in further **programs!**’” (**Smith**).