

# PROPER PUNCTUATION FOR SUCCESSFUL WRITING



Mayland Community College  
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PUNCTUATION MARKS

Punctuation marks are symbols used to add clarity to writing. Without punctuation it would be difficult to determine the exact meaning of sentences, as shown in the following example:

Mary said Hi Joe how are you doing I havent seen you in a long time  
*as opposed to....*

Mary said, "Hi, Joe, how are you doing? I haven't seen you in a long time."

As you can see, using punctuation adds clarity to writing.

In this module you will learn to

- identify punctuation marks.
- punctuate sentences using punctuation rules.

There are 12 commonly used punctuation marks:

<b>Apostrophe</b> ‘	<b>Hyphen</b> -
<b>Colon</b> :	<b>Parentheses</b> ( )
<b>Comma</b> ,	<b>Period</b> .
<b>Dash</b> —	<b>Question Mark</b> ?
<b>Ellipsis Marks</b> ...	<b>Quotation Marks</b> “ ”
<b>Exclamation Point</b> !	<b>Semicolon</b> ;

**Practice:** The following sentences from advertisements show how punctuation marks are used. Write the name for each punctuation mark used in the space provided. The first one is completed as an example.

**Here's an eye-opening offer.** Apostrophe, hyphen, period

**Is this the year you'll buy a car?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Desktop computer—never priced lower!** \_\_\_\_\_

**Brownies from scratch (with or without nuts).** \_\_\_\_\_

**Buy now...there's no better time!** \_\_\_\_\_

## APOSTROPHE ( ' )

Apostrophes are used in writing contractions. A contraction is a shorter way of writing some pairs of words.

**Examples:** are not...aren't      I am...I'm      She is...she's

**Apostrophes are used to show possession.**

**Example:** Donna's car                      The child's toy                      Ted's adventure

**If a word is singular, the apostrophe comes before the "s." If an "s" is added to make the word plural, then the apostrophe is last.**

**Examples:**    Family's car (1 family)              Families' celebrations (many families)  
                  Parent's house (1 parent)              Parents' house (both parents)  
                  Fox's den ( 1 fox)                      Foxes' dens (many foxes)  
                  Teacher's plan (1 teacher)              Teachers' plans (many teachers)  
                  State's rights (1 state)                      States' rights (many states)

**If a word is made plural without a final "s," then the apostrophe is still placed before the "s."**

**Examples:**    children's books  
                  Men's clothing

**Singular words that end in "s" should still have the apostrophe and "s" to make them plural.**

**Examples:**    Lewis's              actress's

## **COLON ( : )**

A colon may be used after the salutation of a business letter, between the hours and minutes in expressing time (except in military time), to answer an implied question, and to introduce a list.

**Examples:**    Dear Mr. Smith:                      8:30 A.M.              7:00 P.M.  
                  (military time would be written as 830, 1130, 2000, etc.)  
                  \*The salad contained many vegetables: lettuce, tomatoes, and avocados.  
                  \*I know what you need: a nice cup of tea.

**\*Colons to introduce a list can only be used after a complete sentence.**

**Practice:** Insert an apostrophe or a colon in the following sentences. The first is completed as an example:

**I'm not eating any more of Guido's pizza.**

1. She cant attend the party.
2. Dear Mr. Sneller This is an application for employment.
3. There are a variety of games scheduled tennis, racquetball, and volleyball.
4. The time is exactly 103 P.M.
5. A country should be judged by how it treats its most vulnerable people the young and the elderly.

## **EXCLAMATION POINT ( ! )**

The exclamation point is used to express a strong feeling. It is used at the end of a word, a phrase, or a sentence. Exclamation points are not usually appropriate in most expository writing.

**Examples:** Help! Dad! Help!  
Hurry! We are going to miss the bus.

## **ELLIPSIS MARKS ( ... )**

An ellipsis ( ... ) is used to show when one or more words are omitted in quoted material or an unfinished sentence. Use three ellipsis marks if they are used to interrupt the sentence. Use four ellipsis marks (one as a period) if they are used to finish the sentence.

**Examples:** The speaker said, "Love your work...and follow your dream."  
The salary varies, and will depend on work experience.  
The salary range varies....

## **HYPHEN ( - )**

A hyphen is used to join the words in compound numbers.

**Example:** twenty-eight thirty-two

A hyphen is used between numbers in a fraction.

**Example:** one-fourth five-eighths

A hyphen is used between two adjectives when they are written before the word they modify.

**Example:** heavy-duty wrench double-spaced copy

A hyphen is used after the prefixes self and ex when ex means former.

**Example:** self-sufficient ex-president

**Practice:** Place hyphens where they are needed.

1. He did one half the job he was supposed to do.
2. The off duty security guard stopped the car thieves.
3. The vice president told him he was fired.
4. They later found out he was an ex con.

## **DASH ( — )**

Dashes set off lists, added material, or explanations. In this regard, they can function like colons, but are used in less formal writing, or when a list occurs at the beginning of a sentence.

**Example:** The villain promised to return the hostages—in body bags.

A monkey, two parrots, two pythons—his pets certainly are exotic.

Dashes can be used like parentheses to set off material that interrupts the flow of the sentence when that material needs special attention. Parentheses are used for less important material.

**Example:** Frank—the guy who broke Sarah’s heart and stole her car—now dates her sister.

Dashes are used around material that would normally be set off with commas, when that material also contains commas.

**Example:** We hired Danielle—a wise-cracking, no-nonsense, well-dressed secretary—to manage customer service.

## **PARENTHESES [ ( ) ]**

Parentheses are used around words included in a sentence to add information. These words help make the idea clearer.

**Example:** The Duong’s children (Kim and Tran) speak Laotian.

Parentheses are used to enclose letters or figures that mark items in a series.

**Example:** They came up with three choices: (1) visit the Grand Canyon, (2) take a cruise to the Bahamas, or (3) fly to London.

**Practice:** Insert parentheses in each of the following sentences. The first one is completed as an example.

**The girls (Sally and Martine) packed a nice lunch: ham sandwiches, pickles, and chips.**

1. Three metals steel, chrome, and aluminum were included in the sculpture.
2. The main contenders Smith, Granville, and Louter were present at the meeting.
3. Dr. Smith’s term as superintendent 1978 – 1989 was very profitable.

## **PERIOD ( . )**

The period is the most frequently used punctuation mark. A period is used at the end of a sentence.

**Example:** The Castros have been married for 25 years.

A period is used after an initial and after an abbreviated word.

**Examples:** C. J. Barrett Mrs. Dr. P.M. Co.

### QUESTION MARK ( ? )

A question mark is used at the end of a sentence that asks a direct question. A question mark should not be used after an indirect question.

**Examples:** What are your plans after you finish the cosmetology training?  
She was asked if she wanted a full-time job.

**Practice:** Insert a period or question mark (?) in the following sentences. The first one is completed as an example.

**Sheila asked, “Are we going at 7 A.M. or 7 P.M.?”**

1. He was introduced to Mr Reynolds
2. What is the name of that song
3. Hank didn't say where he went after 2:15 AM
5. How many applicants are there for the job

### QUOTATION MARKS ( “...” )

Quotation marks are used to punctuate titles of poems, songs, magazine articles, stories, and chapters of books or newspapers.

**Examples:** The song, “Pop Goes the Weasel,” is popular with children.  
The section entitled, “Interviewing Tips,” was very helpful.

Quotation marks are used before and after a direct quotation and to emphasize certain words.

**Examples:** “Yes,” said the teacher. “You’re going to have a final exam.”  
He thinks his project is “superior.”

If a quoted passage includes material that would normally have quotes, single quotes are used.

**Examples:** Mary said, “I read ‘The Raven’ for class.”  
“We can’t go to the movies,” Sam said, “because I am suffering from ‘intestinal mischief.’”

### SEMICOLON ( ; )

A semicolon is used to join two independent clauses not connected by a conjunction like *and*, *but*, *for*, or *or*.

**Example:** Albert gets up early; this is the best time for him to study.

A semicolon is used to join two independent clauses that are connected by a transitional expression. Some transitional expressions include *however*, *therefore*, *meanwhile*, *finally*, and *for example*.

**Example:** The Callahans are going to Mexico on vacation; however, their children are going to summer camp.

Semicolons are also used to clarify items in a series when each item contains commas.

**Examples:** The committee includes Meg Murray, noted psychiatrist; Tom Sullivan, award-winning author; and Clark Phillips, legendary director.

We packed coats, hats, and gloves for playing in the snow; cookies, apples, and chips for snacks; and cards, books, and board games for entertainment.

**Practice:** Insert quotation marks or semicolons in each of the following sentences. The first one is completed as an example.

**“Ave Maria” is still popular at weddings.**

1. The train was late it arrived two hours behind schedule.
2. He is an early riser however, he is always late for work.
3. The trio is talented Bill on piano, Greg on bass, and Joyce on drums all play well together.
4. The leader said Be positive and have a can-do attitude.
5. They insisted on bringing bathing suits, towels, and snorkels for the pool beach balls, Frisbees, and pails for the beach and racquets, balls, and sun visors for the tennis courts.

## COMMAS

Commas are used mainly as follows:

1. To separate items in a series.
2. To set off introductory material.
3. Before and after words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence.
4. Between two complete thoughts connected by and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet.
5. To set off a direct quotation from the rest of a sentence.
6. For certain everyday material.

It is helpful to remember that the comma often marks a slight pause, or break, in a sentence. Read aloud the sentence examples given for each rule, and listen for the minor pauses, or breaks, that are signaled by commas.

## 1. Comma Between Items In A Series:

Do you drink tea with milk, lemon, or honey?

Today the dishwasher stopped working, the garbage bag split, and the refrigerator turned into an icebox.

The television talk show host annoyed him each time he stuttered, said, “Um,” or repeated himself.

**Note:** A comma may not be necessary if using the word and between two descriptive words sounds more natural.

**Example:** Instead of saying: Jan awoke from a restless, nightmare-filled sleep.  
You could say: Jan awoke from a restless and nightmare-filled sleep.

But notice in the following sentence that the descriptive words do not sound natural when and is inserted between them. In such cases, no comma is used.

Wanda drove a bright blue Corvette. (A bright and blue Corvette doesn't sound right, so no comma is used.)

## 2. Commas To Set Off Introductory Material.

**Example:** When the president entered, the room became hushed.

**Practice:** Place commas after introductory material. The first one is completed as an example.

**Quietly entering the room, the man looked around as if expecting someone.**

1. Feeling brave and silly at the same time Tony volunteered to go on stage and help the magician.
2. While I was eating my tuna sandwich the cats circled my chair like hungry sharks.
3. Because my parents died when I was young I have learned to look after myself. Even though I am now independent I still carry a special loneliness within me.
4. At first putting extra hot pepper flakes on the pizza seemed like a good idea. However I felt otherwise when flames seemed about to shoot out of my mouth.

## 3. Comma Around Words Interrupting The Flow Of Thought

Use commas before and after words or phrases that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence.

My brother, a sports nut, owns over five thousand baseball cards.

That game show, at long last, has been canceled.

The children used the old Buick, rusted from disuse, as a backyard clubhouse.

Usually you can “hear” words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence. However, if you are not sure that certain words are interrupters, remove them from the sentence for a moment. If it still makes sense without the words, you know that the words are interrupters and the information they give is nonessential. Such nonessential information is set off with commas. In the sentence

Dody Thompson, who lives next door, won the javelin-throwing competition.

The words *who lives next door* are extra information, not needed to identify the subject of the sentence, *Dody Thompson*. Put commas around such nonessential information. On the other hand, in the sentence

The woman who lives next door won the javelin-throwing competition.

The words *who lives next door* supply essential information—information needed for us to identify the woman being spoken of. If the words were removed from the sentence, we would no longer know who won the competition. Commas are *not* used around such essential information.

Here is another example:

Wilson Hall, which the tornado destroyed, was ninety years old.

Here the words *which the tornado destroyed* are extra information, not needed to identify the subject of the sentence, *Wilson Hall*. Commas go around such non-essential information. On the other hand, in the sentence

The building which the tornado destroyed was ninety years old.

The words *which the tornado destroyed* are needed to identify the building. Commas are *not* used around such essential information.

As noted above, however, most of the time you will be able to “hear” words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence and will not have to think about whether the words are essential or nonessential.

**Practice:** Use commas to set off interrupting words. The first one is completed as an example.

**The graduating students, in a last attempt to rebel, wore blue jeans to the ceremony.**

1. On Friday my day off I went to get a haircut.
2. Dracula who had a way with women is Tony’s favorite movie hero. He feels that the Wolfman on the other hand showed no class in handling women.
3. Many people forget that Franklin Roosevelt one of our most effective presidents was also handicapped.
4. Mowing the grass especially when it is six inches high is my least favorite job.
5. A jar of chicken noodle soup which was all there was in the refrigerator did not make for a very satisfying meal.

#### 4. Comma between Complete Thoughts

Use a comma between two complete thoughts connected by and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet.

**Example:** The wedding was scheduled for four o'clock, but the bride changed her mind at two.

We could always tell when our instructor felt disorganized, for his shirt would not be tucked in.

Rich has to work on Monday nights, so he tapes the TV football game on his digital recorder.

**Note:** Be careful not to use a comma in sentences having one subject and a double verb. The comma is used only in sentences made up of two complete thoughts (two subjects and two verbs). In the following sentence, there is only one subject (Bill) with a double verb (will go and forget). Therefore, no comma is needed:

Bill will go partying tonight and forget all about tomorrow's exam.

Likewise, the following sentence has only one subject (Rita) and a double verb (was and will work); therefore, no comma is needed:

Rita was a waitress at the Holiday Inn last summer and probably will work there this summer.

**Practice:** Place a comma before a joining word that connects two complete thoughts (two subjects and 1 verb). Remember, do not place a comma within sentences that have only one subject and a double verb. The first one is completed as an example.

**The oranges in the refrigerator were covered with blue mold, and the potatoes in the cupboard felt like sponges.**

1. All the slacks in the shop were on sale but not a single pair was my size.
2. Martha often window-shops in the malls for hours and comes home without buying anything.
3. Tony left the dentist's office with his mouth still numb from Novocain and he talked with a lisp for two hours.
4. I covered the walls with three coats of white paint but the purple color underneath still showed through.
5. The car squealed down the entrance ramp and sped recklessly out onto the freeway.
6. The aliens in the science fiction film visited our planet in peace but we greeted them with violence.
7. I felt like shouting at the gang of boys but didn't dare open my mouth.
8. Lenny claims he wants to succeed in college but he has missed classes all semester.

## 5. Comma with Direct Quotations

Use a comma to set off a direct quotation from the rest of a sentence.

His father shouted, “Why don’t you go out and get a job?”

“Our modern world has lost a sense of the sacredness of life,” the speaker said.

“No,” said Celia to Jerry. “I won’t go to the roller derby with you.”

“Can anyone remember,” wrote Emerson, “when the times were not hard and money not scarce?”

**Note:** Commas and periods at the end of a quotation go inside quotation marks, unless parenthetical citation is used to document a source.

**Example:** According to the article, “over 20 percent of the results were incorrect” (Smith 387).

**Practice:** Use commas to set off quotations from the rest of the sentence. The first one is completed as an example.

**The man yelled, “Call an ambulance, somebody!”**

1. My partner on the dance floor said “Don’t be so stiff. You look as if you’d swallowed an umbrella.”
2. The question on the anatomy test read “What human organ grows faster than any other, never stops growing, and always remains the same size?”
3. The student behind me whispered “What time is it?”

## 6. Comma with Everyday Material

Use a comma with certain everyday material, such as persons spoken to, dates, addresses, openings and closings of letters, and numbers.

### Persons Spoken To

Tina, go to bed if you’re not feeling well.

Are you coming with us, Bob?

### Dates

March 4, 1992, is when Martha buried her third husband.

### Addresses

Tony’s grandparents live at 183 Roxborough Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44112.

(**Note:** No comma is used to mark off the zip code. Include two spaces between state and zip code.)

### **Openings and closings of letters**

Dear Larry,

Sincerely yours,

Truly yours,

(**Note:** In formal letters, a colon is used after the opening: Dear Sir: or Dear Madam: )

### **Numbers**

The dishonest dealer turned the used car's odometer from 98,170 miles to 39,170 miles.

**Practice: Putting it all together. Place punctuation where needed.**

1. Baggy threadbare jeans the kind mothers like to throw away are my favorite
2. After punching the alarm clock with his fist Hank turned over and went back to sleep
3. She thought she was studying astronomy when she was really studying astrology her first report was on sun signs
4. Holding a baited trap Clyde cautiously approached the gigantic mouse hole In addition he held a broom in his hand
5. Superman believes in truth justice and the American way
6. My fathers typical swimming lesson was to talk to me calmly hold my hand firmly then throw me into the pool
7. Pauls secret recipe included red wine mushrooms salt pepper and oregano however I still think there was something else
8. Also he wore a white hat when he cooked imagining himself a world class chef
9. A sudden breeze knocked over the glass placed precariously on the edge of the table as Mother screamed Quick Close the window
10. I love to cook and eat Italian food especially spaghetti and lasagna
11. The guest list for the party was impressive Chris Bolton representative Margaret Smythe ambassador Friedrich Wallace ombudsman and Ernie Mathers senator
12. Rita usually always punctual did not show up at her job and probably won't be in class tonight either
13. Cindy stated But I thought they lived in Baltimore Maryland for twenty five years not Hoboken New Jersey
14. July 4 1776 was when the Declaration of Independence was adopted
15. The waiter announced that salad soup or dessert came with the meal
16. Connie said in a sarcastic tone Thank you for helping

17. In her opinion Mr. Howard her math teacher had no sense of humor
18. Oh yeah, John snarled They re going to the movie over my dead body
19. After the movie they walked to the car unaware that John was waiting in the darkness his hands clenched at his sides
20. Mitch and Dennis both work hard and get good grades Bill on the other hand would rather go fishing
21. Leah my brainy sister cheated her way through high school
22. Can you believe that Clarence their youngest was born on March 2 1980
23. The childrens game soon got out of hand the monitor had to step in
24. The US Coast Guard protector of Americas shores was held responsible.
25. Her fathers final words to her date were Drive carefully...and have my daughter back by midnight or else
26. The speaker said Follow your heart...and you will find your dream.
27. Who could pass this up cherries at 98 cents a pound
28. Fire Fire Somebody call 911
29. This model he explained had a heavy duty exterior finish
30. Five of the students Megan Noriko Chris Tony and Liza were awarded first prizes
31. They were told to do it in this order 1 make sandwiches 2 pack bags and 3 load car
32. Success has made him very self satisfied don't you agree
33. Does Mitch the word processor work from 830 A M to 430 P M
34. Yes said Yuki Sadako is my half sister
35. You re not alone My friend Paul the ex cop will accompany you
36. Did you see the car that sped around the corner It sprayed slush on everyone
37. It was a great map no matter how I tried I still could not find my destination
38. Are you aware that this is our top quality extra strength stain remover

39. Oh no I couldn't possibly go to the party if she is there
40. I expected you to set a better example for the others Mike
41. The movie stars Kitty Litter and Dredge Rivers were married on September 12 1991 and lived in Los Angeles California for one month
42. They received 75000 congratulatory fan letters and were given picture contracts worth \$3000000 in the first week of their marriage
43. Kitty left Dredge on October 12 1991 and ran off with their marriage counselor a decision she regrets to this day
44. We packed a good lunch for the trip apples oranges and grapes for snacks veggie wraps sandwiches and celery sticks for the main meal and grape juice water and cola for drinks
45. The scientific evidence from a study of two hundred subjects indicates that a high fat high protein diet is not the most healthy Fowler 27
46. She would have attended Juilliard or so we thought had it not been for meeting Julian one fateful day in the park
47. Mark pointed out that according to Jones 1989 there are billions of galaxies yet to be discovered
48. Mark grabbed a tiny towel bolted out of the bathroom ran toward the phone and picked it up just as it stopped ringing
49. My God man pull yourself together said Horace as he sat down
50. Wow Her singing was really awesome