

## Punctuation

Punctuation can sometimes be confusing and tricky. Below are a few punctuation rules to keep in mind while writing your papers and assignments.

### Importance of Punctuation Marks

Punctuation is essential for understanding any written text. You *need* to include punctuation marks in your sentences. Punctuation marks, including periods, commas, colons, semicolons, and dashes, are used to indicate where an idea starts, expands, changes, or ends.

Make sure to use punctuation marks when and where they are needed. In brief,

- A comma “,” indicates a pause within the sentence and often separates ideas
- A colon “:” is used to list examples, expand on an idea, or introduce a quote
- A semicolon “;” separates two complete sentences that are contextually related
- A dash “-” introduces a new idea that is shocking or demands emphasis
- A full stop or period “.” marks the end of an idea

*Do not neglect punctuation in your writing.*

### Commas

After periods, commas are the most commonly used punctuation marks. Use commas:

1. To separate words or groups of words in a series of three or more items  
*Ex:* I enjoy swimming, running, and hiking.
2. To separate two adjectives whose order is interchangeable  
*Ex:* They found her to be a gentle, courteous woman.
3. Before a coordinating conjunction that separates two independent clauses  
*Ex:* Christine hated the heat of the sun, yet she sat outside to tan.
4. When starting the sentence with an introductory phrase or a dependent clause  
*Ex:* Disregarding the ban, he entered the building and took back what was his.  
If you have any further questions about the assignment, just let me know.
5. To indicate nonessential words, clauses, or phrases  
*Ex:* Carmen, an introvert by nature, observed the argument from a distance.
6. To introduce or interrupt direct quotations

*Ex:* I said, “I don’t care.”

“Why,” asked mom, “don’t you care?”

7. To separate a statement from a question

*Ex:* I’m not in trouble, am I?

8. To separate contrasting parts of the same sentence

*Ex:* This is his notebook, not yours.

Also take note of the following:

- A comma is often used where the meaning of the sentence is ambiguous or compromised and clarity is needed.
- **Comma Splices:** Two independent clauses **cannot** be joined together using a comma, or else the sentence might turn into a run-on sentence. Simply use a period (or, if appropriate, a semicolon) to separate the clauses.

*Ex:* She got off the bus at the station, she walked all the way home. (incorrect)

She got off the bus at the station. She then walked all the way home. (correct)

## Semicolons

A semicolon is used to join two independent clauses that are related in meaning and context.

*Ex:* I couldn’t focus enough to reply to his email; I was too preoccupied with other matters.

Notice how both of these clauses are complete sentences, which makes them independent clauses. Each could end with a period, but because the ideas they present are connected, a semicolon is used instead.

*Use semicolons sparingly (i.e., not too often in your writing).*