

The goal of this handout is to provide you with some **helpful techniques for identifying & correcting common punctuation mistakes.**

COMMAS

General Rule: Never separate a subject and a verb with a comma.

| Rule: | Example: | How to remember or check for this rule: |
|---|---|--|
| Use commas with coordinating conjunctions to join independent clauses. | <p>RIGHT: The narrative restarts about halfway through the novel, and it contains several digressions.</p> <p>ALSO RIGHT: The narrative restarts about halfway through the novel and contains several digressions.</p> <p>WRONG: The narrative restarts about halfway through the novel and it contains several digressions.</p> <p>ALSO WRONG: The narrative restarts about halfway through the novel, and contains several digressions.</p> | Remember, FANBOYS (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So) need to take a comma break. |
| Use commas to set off nonrestrictive phrases. | <p>RIGHT: The proposal, which aims to address lagging sales, is based on several factual inaccuracies.</p> <p>ALSO RIGHT: The proposal that aims to address lagging sales is based on several factual inaccuracies.</p> <p>WRONG: The proposal, that aims to address lagging sales, is based on several factual inaccuracies.</p> <p>ALSO WRONG: The proposal which aims to address lagging sales is based on several factual inaccuracies.</p> | Drop everything between the commas. Does the sentence still communicate what it needs to? Does it still make sense? If so, you're doing it right. |
| Use commas after these introductory phrases: - adverbial clauses - participle phrases - linked prepositional phrases | <p>ADV. RIGHT: Happily, no one was injured in the accident.</p> <p>ALSO ADV. RIGHT: Unless you've seen it, you won't believe it.</p> <p>PARTICIPLE RIGHT: Containing several digressions, the narrative restarts halfway through the novel.</p> | Find the subject & the verb of the sentence. If there are dependent clauses attached, you should separate them with commas. |

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| - infinitive phrases | <p>PREP. RIGHT: During the storm in the middle of last week, I woke up when lightning struck the tree.</p> <p>INF. RIGHT: To understand this problem in all of its complexity, we should first look at the effects of airbrushed advertisements.</p> | |
| Commas and periods go inside quotation marks. | <p>RIGHT: “This is my only grammar pet peeve,” J.D. said. “Commas and periods outside of quotation marks look like lonely little penguins someone locked outside in a rainstorm, and what kind of person would do that?”</p> | <p>Commas are like little penguins. Don’t leave them outside!</p> |

SEMICOLONS

General Rule: They split the difference between a period & a comma.

| Rule | Example | Easy Explanation |
|---|---|--|
| Use semicolons to join closely related independent clauses. | <p>RIGHT: The narrative restarts about halfway through the novel; it contains several digressions.</p> <p>WRONG: The narrative restarts about halfway through the novel; the main character decides to search for his father.</p> | <p>The upper period separates ideas; the bottom comma joins them together.</p> |
| Use semicolons to separate inequivalent items in a list. | <p>RIGHT: I went to London, England; Paris, France; Rome, Italy; and Georgetown, Texas.</p> <p>ALSO RIGHT: I went to London, Paris, Rome, Amsterdam, Liverpool, and Georgetown.</p> <p>WRONG: I went to London, England, Paris, France, Rome, Italy, and Georgetown, Texas.</p> <p>ALSO WRONG: I went to London; Paris; Rome; Amsterdam; Liverpool; and Georgetown.</p> | <p>The upper period shows that units in a list should be separated; the bottom comma shows that they’re parallel.</p> |

COLONS

General Rule: Colons are used to add detail or further clarify a statement.

| Rule | Example | Easy Explanation |
|---|--|--|
| Use colons preceding an explanatory phrase or list. | <p>RIGHT: There are several factors we must consider: the ambient temperature, the size of the sample, and the shelf life of the nanodroids.</p> <p>ALSO RIGHT: My solution is simple: we should let the penguins inside.</p> <p>WRONG: There are several factors we must consider: including the</p> | <p>Replace the colon with one of the following phrases:</p> <p>it is</p> <p>that is</p> |

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| | ambient temperature, the size of the sample, and the shelf life of the nanodroids. | they are for example If the sentence still makes sense, it's right. |
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