

PUNCTUATION RULES

COMMAS, SEMICOLONS, PARENTHESES, APOSTROPHES,
AND CAPITALIZATION



Southeast Campus
Reading/Writing Resource Center
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1. COMMAS

How to Use Commas



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Commas Change Meaning

- The old lady collected all sorts of things: silver, paper, hats, and clocks.
- The old lady collected all sorts of things: silver paper, hats, and clocks.
- The old lady collected all sorts of things: silver, paper hats and clocks.

How are these sentences different?



Use a comma before a **coordinating conjunction** that separates two independent clauses.

- The child agreed, **but** the parent objected.
- Time flies when we are having fun, **and** we are always having fun.

Use a comma after **introductory words, phrases, or clauses.**

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- **Yes,** I do need that report.
- **To apply for this job,** you must have previous experience.



Use commas to set off elements that **interrupt or add information** in a sentence.

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- I am, **as you have probably noticed**, very nervous about this.
- Mary, **who has a three children**, cannot go this Saturday.

OTHER IMPORTANT USES OF COMMAS

List of words

Break up numbers into thousands

Inside quotation marks

- We will need hammers, nails, and a saw.

- 1,999
- 3, 435, 234

- “We are leaving tomorrow,” said Mike.

- The street was filled with angry protestors, shouting

- 23, 432, 975, 324

- “The boys are fine,” sighed the babysitter.

OTHER IMPORTANT USES OF COMMAS

Before or surrounding the name or title of a person directly addressed.

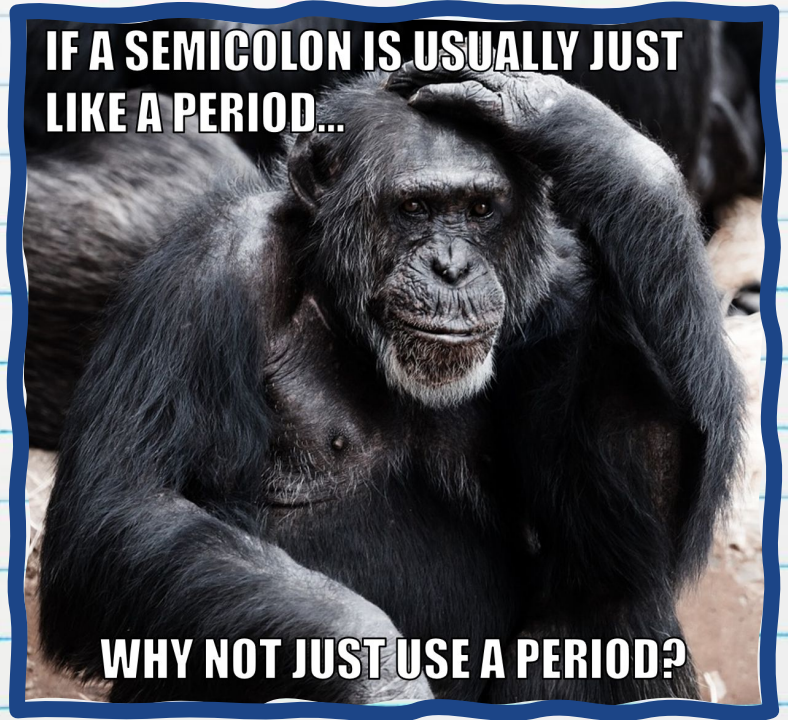
- Alisha, will you help with the party?
- Yes, Doctor, I will.

Dates

- They met on February 14, 2021.
- If you omit any part of the date, do not use a comma.
 - They met in February 2021.
 - They met on February 14.

2. SEMICOLONS ;

How to Use Semicolons



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A SEMICOLON IS USED
TO CONNECT MAJOR
SENTENCE ELEMENTS
OF EQUAL
GRAMMATICAL RANK.



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USE SEMICOLONS TO SEPARATE TWO COMPLETE SENTENCES NOT JOINED BY A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION.

- Call me tomorrow; I will give you my answer then.
- Corals grow very slowly; the creation of a coral reef takes centuries.



3. PARENTHESES ()

How to Use Parentheses



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USE PARENTHESES TO ENCLOSE WORDS OR NUMBERS THAT CLARIFY OR ARE USED AS AN ASIDE.

- I expect six hundred dollars (\$600).
- He finally answered (after taking five minutes to think about it) that he did not understand the question.

(Parentheses show less importance than commas.)



PERIODS GO INSIDE THE PARENTHESES ONLY IF AN ENTIRE SENTENCE IS ENCLOSED.

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- Please read the analysis (I enclosed it as attachment A.).
- Please read the analysis (attachment A).



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4. APOSTROPHES '

How to Use Apostrophes



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APOSTROPHES ARE USED IN CONTRACTIONS WHERE THE LETTERS HAVE BEEN LEFT OUT.

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- Do not/ don't
- Is not/ isn't
- You have/ you've
- She would/ she'd

AN APOSTROPHE SHOWS POSSESSION.

Singular Possessive Nouns

- One woman's hat
- Ms. Chang's house
- Driver's side
- Lois's sister
- Marx's teachings

Plural Possessive Nouns

- Children's money
- Diplomats' cars
- Joyce and Greg's computer

NOTES ON APOSTROPHES

With singular compound nouns, the 's goes at the end of a word

- My sister-in-law's quilts



Omit the apostrophe when writing plural numbers and abbreviations

- Figure 8s
- The 1900s
- Four IOUs

NOTES ON APOSTROPHES

Do not use an apostrophe with possessive pronouns.

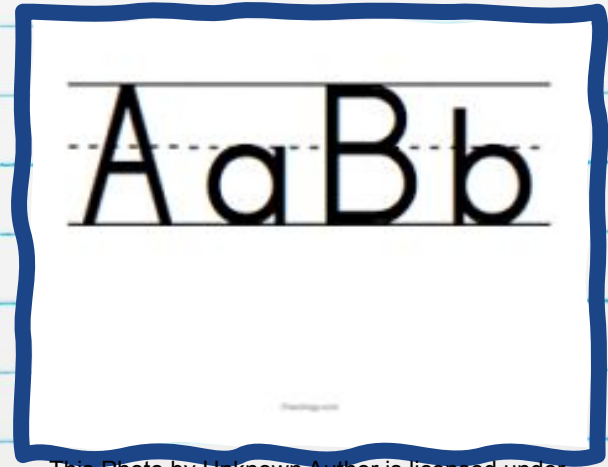
- Possessive Pronouns:
his, hers, its, theirs, ours,
yours, whose

- These already show possession.

The only time an apostrophe is used with "its" is when it is the contraction for it is.

- It's a nice day.

5. CAPITALIZATION



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CAPITALIZE THE FOLLOWING:

First word of a quoted sentence

Proper Nouns

Person's title preceding the name, but as a description following a name

- He said, "Treat her as you would your own daughter."

- Golden Gate Bridge



- Dr. Mike Enger will speak at the conference. Mike Enger, a doctor, will present a

CAPITALIZE THE FOLLOWING:

Titles when used as a direct address

The first, last, and major words of titles.

In letters, capitalize the word of the salutation and closing

• Will you cast a vote, Senator?

• The Declaration of Independence

• Do not capitalize a, an, the, but, as if and or

• Dear Ms. Mohamed:
• My dear Mr. Sanchez,
• Yours truly,

DO NOT CAPITALIZE:

- Names of seasons (winter, fall, summer, spring)
- Common nouns (cat, dog, house, park)



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