

Punctuation

American writer and satirist Russell Baker stated, “When speaking aloud, you punctuate constantly—with body language. Your listener hears commas, dashes, quotation marks, exclamation points, quotation marks as you shout, whisper, pause, wave your arms, roll your eyes, wrinkle your brow. In writing, punctuation plays the role of body language. It helps the readers hear the way you want to be heard” (Baker 24).

In this handout, you’ll find basic information about the following punctuation marks:

- Apostrophes
- Brackets
- Colon
- Comma
- Dashes
- Ellipsis
- Exclamation Marks
- Hyphens
- Parenthesis
- Periods
- Question Marks
- Quotation Marks
- Semicolons
- Slashes

Apostrophes

Apostrophes indicate possession.

Batman’s cape features his logo.

Use an ‘s even for singular words that end in the letter “s.”

Abyss’s mission is to destroy all matter in the universe.

Many people choose to omit the ‘s in the example above, but it’s more correct to use it.

Omit the ‘s in plural words that end in “s.”

Superheroes’ powers vary.

We also use apostrophes to signal the omission of letters in contractions.

Wolverine shouldn’t use his claws to trim the hedges.

Brackets

If you are using a quotation in a paper that doesn't grammatically agree with the rest of the sentence, you can use brackets to indicate a change that you've made to the quote.

Bruce Wayne's first name came from Robert Bruce, the Scottish patriot. Bruce, being a playboy, [is] a man of gentry.

If you're using a quote that has a misspelling in it, you can insert the word *sic*, Latin for "thus." Using *sic* indicates that you're aware of the misspelling.

My friend always writes Superman's real name as Klark [sic] Kent because he likes spelling the superhero's name with a "K" instead of with a "C."

Colon

Use a colon to set off a list.

Here's a list of some superheroes:
Wolverine
Flash Gordon
Captain America
Batman

Use a colon to set off an appositive, which is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun.

Magneto is haunted by a secret from his past: he is a Holocaust survivor.

Use a colon to set off a quote.

Spiderman says: "With great power there must also come great responsibility."

Use a colon to set off a summary or an explanation.

Superheroes come mostly from two different comic book publishers: Marvel Comics and DC Comics.

Commas

Many people have been told to put a comma where they pause, but this only works if we all pause in the same place. Commas act as an anchor in sentences, securing information in chunks so that we can process it more easily. You can learn comma usage more quickly by memorizing the seven categories of comma usage in the

CAPTAIN acronym:

- C** Compound sentence with coordinating conjunction
- A** After introductory phrases, mild interjections, and transitions
- P** Parenthetical elements, including appositives and nonrestrictive elements
- T** To prevent confusion
- A** According to convention
- I** Items in a series
- N** Noncumulative adjectives

Commas, continued

Compound Sentence with Coordinating Conjunction

Place a comma before coordinating conjunctions in compound sentences that contain two independent clauses. You can remember the coordinating conjunctions by using the FANBOYS acrostic (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

Captain America's costume has an American flag motif, and he also carries an almost indestructible shield.

After Introductory Phrases, Mild Interjections, and Transitions

Introductory Phrase

Although we like George Clooney, we hated his portrayal of Batman.

Mild Interjection

George Clooney, you bottom feeding scum, we hated your film.

Transition

The film is a real stinker, although we usually like George Clooney.

Parenthetical Elements, Including Appositives and Nonrestrictive Elements

Parenthetical Elements

Thor, who is originally a mythological god, was a figure of worship to the Norse people.

Appositive

An appositive defines or restates a noun.

The Avengers, a group of superheroes, launched a popular film series.

Nonrestrictive Elements

Nonrestrictive elements add information but not meaning. You could eliminate them from the sentence without changing the meaning of the sentence itself.

The first Avengers film, which was well received, was also a box office smash.

To Prevent Confusion

Use a comma when it will help your reader understand your sentence more easily, particularly when two similar words appear side by side in the sentence.

The hero we wanted to win, won the battle.

To err is human; to forgive, divine.



Commas, continued

According to Convention

Use a comma to set off

- Direct responses like
Well, Robin, I think they went that way.
- Direct quotations like
Batman's butler Alfred says, "Why do we fall down? So we can learn to pick ourselves up."
- Dates like
May 1, 2015

If the date is not the last word in the sentence, place a comma after the year:
We will meet on May 1, 2015, right before the Joker gets out of jail.

- Professional or honorary titles like
Reed Richards, M.D.
- Addresses like
*501 Gotham Way
Gotham, New York*

If the state is not the last word in the sentence, place a comma after the state:
Please come to 501 Gotham Way, Gotham, New York, this Saturday.

- Interrogative tags
Catwoman is a sexy villain, isn't she?
- Numbers like
5,000 or 5,000,000

Items in a Series

Although you may have been taught to leave out the comma before the "and" in a series, it's actually more correct to use it. This last comma is sometimes called the Oxford comma, and it can add clarity.

I would like to thank my parents, Iron Man, and Pepper Potts.
(Try reading the sentence without that last comma!)

Noncumulative Adjectives

Noncumulative adjectives are interchangeable. You can change the order of the adjectives without changing the meaning of the sentence.

Captain America's home is little, airless, cramped, and messy.



Dashes

There are two types of dashes: en dashes, which are so named because they are equal to the width of a lower case letter “N,” an em dashes, which are so named because they are equal to the width of a lower case letter “M.”

Use an en dash to indicate a series.

Reruns of the old “Batman” series from the 1960s are on Monday–Friday from 6:00–7:00 p.m.

Use an em dash to set off ideas you want to emphasize. Do this sparingly because it can make your writing sound choppy.

Superman has one substance over which he has no control—Kryptonite.

Ellipsis

Use ellipsis, the series of three equally spaced periods, to indicate you’ve left something out of the middle of a quote.

Stan Lee, creator of Iron Man, said, “The readers, the young readers, if there was one thing they hated, it was war, it was the military . . . So I got a hero who represented that to the hundredth degree” (“The Invincible Iron Man”).

Exclamation Point

Use exclamation points sparingly, especially in papers you write for your classes. Exclamation points indicate surprise, and they can also indicate emphasis.

Wow! The Incredible Hulk is really green.

Hyphens

Hyphens can be tricky, so always look words up in a dictionary before hyphenating them. Generally, we hyphenate words used as compound adjectives.

Make sure to enclose a self-addressed envelope with your Superheroes fan club membership application.

Parenthesis

Use parenthesis to enclose afterthoughts, minor digressions, or supplemental information.

I really like the first “Avengers” film (with the exception of the annoying Gwyneth Paltrow).

Period

Sentences typically end with a period. If you're writing on a word processor, make sure to space just once after the period.

I like Flash Gordon most of all.

Question Mark

Follow direct questions with a question mark.

Why did Loki cross the road?

You can end requests with a period.

Could you please mail this letter to my idol, Flash Gordon.

Quotation Marks

Use quotation marks to enclose a quote.

Hulk said, "What's wrong with relaxing in a bubble bath after a hard day of saving the world?"

Semicolon

A semicolon indicates to your reader that you have two ideas that are so closely related in thought that you don't want to separate them with a period. To use a semicolon correctly, you must have two independent clauses (sentences with a subject and a verb that make sense on their own).

When he is stressed out or angry, Bruce Banner transforms into the Incredible Hulk; Banner is a shy scientist in real life.

Use a semicolon between items in a series with internal punctuation.

Most superheroes have unique powers. For instance, Spiderman can crawl up a wall like a spider, and he has "spider-sense;" the Incredible Hulk has super strength, he heals almost instantly, and he gets stronger as he gets madder; Thor has advanced strength, he's a Norse god of thunder, he has the unbreakable hammer of Mjolnir.

Slash

Use a slash to separate two or three lines of poetry that have been inserted into your text.

In the 1989 film "Batman," Joker recites this poem to Vicki: I'm only laughing on the outside / My smile is just skin deep / If you could see inside I'm really crying / You might join me for a weep ("Batman").

Notice that you need to place one space on either side of the slash mark.

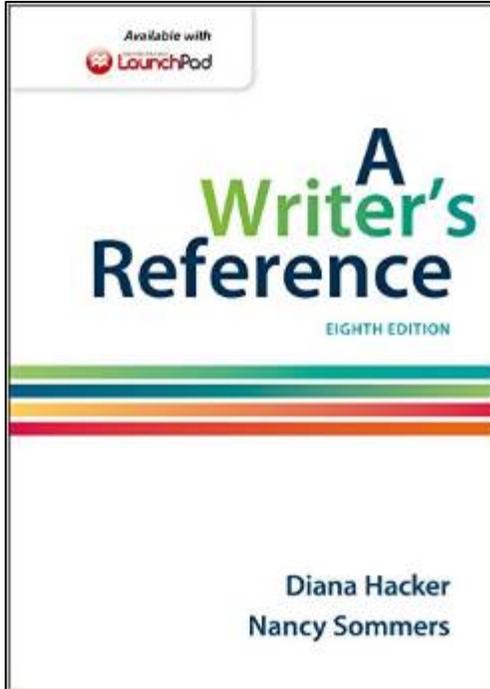
Read More About Punctuation

For more information about punctuation, we highly recommend this book:

A Writer's Reference by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers

ISBN-13: 978-1457666766

(you can type the ISBN number into Amazon.com to order this book)



Works Cited

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