**Proofreading**

Once you have completed your editing, you should always double-check everything by proofreading what you have written. During proofreading, you look for small errors like typos and spacing issues. Proofreading focuses on careless mistakes rather than grammar and content. It covers:

**Punctuation**

**Comma Usage**

1. Use a comma before a [co-ordinating conjunction](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/conjunct.html#co-ordinating%20conjunction) that joins [independent clauses](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/claustyp.html#independent%20clause) (unless the independent clauses are very short):

I wrapped the fresh fish in three layers of newspaper, but my van still smelled like trout for the next week. (commas with two independent clauses)

She invited him to her party and he accepted. (comma unnecessary with short [clauses](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/bldcls.html#clause))

1. Use a comma after an introductory [adverb clause](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/claustyp.html#adverb%20clause) and, often, after an introductory [phrase](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/bldphr.html#phrase) (unless the phrase is very short):

After the hospital had completed its fund-raising campaign, an anonymous donor contributed an additional $10,000. (after introductory adverb clause)

From the east wall to the west, her cottage measures twenty feet. (after introductory [prepositional phrase](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/phrfunc.html#prepositional%20phrase))

In the bottom drawer you will find some pink spandex tights. (no comma with short, closely related phrase)

1. Use a comma to separate items in a series:

Playing in a band can be exciting, but many people do not realize the hardships involved: constant rehearsals, playing until 2 a.m., handling drunken audience members, and transporting heavy equipment to and from gigs. (the comma preceding "and" is optional unless needed to prevent misreading)

1. Use commas to set off **non-restrictive elements** and other parenthetical elements. A **non-restrictive modifier** is a phrase or clause that does not restrict or limit the meaning of the word it is modifying. It is, in a sense, interrupting material that adds extra information to a [sentence](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/subjpred.html#sentence). Even though removing the non-restrictive element would result in some loss of meaning, the sentence would still make sense without it. You should usually set off non-restrictive elements with commas:

The people of Haiti, who for decades have lived with grinding poverty and mind-numbing violence, are unfamiliar with the workings of a true democracy.

A **restrictive modifier** is a phrase or clause that limits the meaning of what it modifies and is essential to the basic idea expressed in the sentence. You should not set off **restrictive elements** with commas:

Those residents of Ottawa who do not hold secure, well-paying jobs must resent the common portrayal of the city as a land of opportunity.

Note that you can use two other punctuation marks to set off non-restrictive elements or other **parenthetical information**: **parentheses** and [dashes](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/dash.html#dash). Enclosing parenthetical information in parentheses reduces the importance of that information:

Mr. Grundy's driving record (with one small exception) was exemplary.

1. Placing parenthetical information between dashes has the opposite effect: it emphasises the material:

Mr. Grundy's driving record -- with one exception -- was exemplary.

Nevertheless, you should usually set off parenthetical information with commas.

**Superfluous Commas**

Equally important in understanding how to use commas effectively is knowing when *not* to use them. While this decision is sometimes a matter of personal taste, there are certain instances when you should definitely avoid a comma.

* Do not use a comma to separate the [subject](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/subjpred.html#subject) from its [predicate](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/subjpred.html#predicate):

[WRONG] Registering for our fitness programs before September 15, will save you thirty percent of the membership cost.

[RIGHT] Registering for our fitness programs before September 15 will save you thirty percent of the membership cost.

* Do not use a comma to separate a [verb](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/verbs.html#verb) from its [object](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/objcompl.html#object) or its [subject complement](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/objcompl.html#subject%20complement), or a [preposition](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/preposit.html#preposition) from its object:

[WRONG] I hope to mail to you before Christmas, a current snapshot of my dog Benji.

She travelled around the world with, a small backpack, a bedroll, a pup tent and a camera.

[RIGHT] I hope to mail to you before Christmas a current snapshot of my dog Benji.

[RIGHT] She travelled around the world with a small backpack, a bedroll, a pup tent and a camera.

* Do not misuse a comma after a co-ordinating conjunction:

[WRONG] Sleet fell heavily on the tin roof but, the family was used to the noise and paid it no attention.

[RIGHT] Sleet fell heavily on the tin roof, but the family was used to the noise and paid it no attention.

* Do not use commas to set off words and short phrases (especially introductory ones) that are not parenthetical or that are very slightly so:

[WRONG] After dinner, we will play badminton.

[RIGHT] After dinner we will play badminton.

* Do not use commas to set off restrictive elements:

[WRONG] The fingers, on his left hand, are bigger than those on his right.

[RIGHT] The fingers on his left hand are bigger than those on his right.

* Do not use a comma before the first item or after the last item of a series:

[WRONG] The treasure chest contained, three wigs, some costume jewellery and five thousand dollars in Monopoly money.

[WRONG] You should practice your punches, kicks and foot sweeps, if you want to improve in the martial arts.

[RIGHT] The treasure chest contained three wigs, some costume jewellery and five thousand dollars in Monopoly money.

[RIGHT] You should practice your punches, kicks and foot sweeps if you want to improve in the martial arts.

# The Semicolon

You will usually use the **semicolon** to link [independent clauses](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/claustyp.html#independent%20clause) not joined by a [co-ordinating conjunction](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/conjunct.html#co-ordinating%20conjunction). Semicolons should join only those independent clauses that are closely related in meaning.

Abdominal exercises help prevent back pain; proper posture is also important.

The auditors made six recommendations; however, only one has been adopted so far.

Do not use a semicolon to link a [dependent clause](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/claustyp.html#dependent%20clauses) or a [phrase](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/bldphr.html#phrase) to an independent clause.

[WRONG] Although gaining and maintaining a high level of physical fitness takes a good deal of time; the effort pays off in the long run.

[RIGHT] Although gaining and maintaining a high level of physical fitness takes a good deal of time, the effort pays off in the long run.

Generally, you should not place a semicolon before a co-ordinating conjunction that links two independent clauses. The only exception to this guideline is if the two independent clauses are very long and already contain a number of [commas](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/comma.html#comma).

[WRONG] The economy has been sluggish for four years now; but some signs of improvement are finally beginning to show.

[RIGHT] The economy has been sluggish for four years now, but some signs of improvement are finally beginning to show.

It may be useful to remember that, for the most part, you should use a semicolon only where you could also use a [period](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/endpunct.html#period).

There is one exception to this guideline. When punctuating a list or series of elements in which one or more of the elements contains an internal comma, you should use semicolons instead of commas to separate the elements from one another:

Henry's mother believes three things: that every situation, no matter how grim, will be happily resolved; that no one knows more about human nature than she; and that Henry, who is thirty-five years old, will never be able to do his own laundry.

# The Colon

Writers often confuse the colon with the [semicolon](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/semicoln.html#semicolon), but their uses are entirely different.

## When to Use a Colon

The **colon** focuses the reader's attention on what is to follow, and as a result, you should use it to introduce a list, a summation, or an idea that somehow completes the introductory idea. You may use the colon in this way, however, only after an [independent clause](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/claustyp.html#independent%20clause):

He visited three cities during his stay in the Maritimes: Halifax, Saint John and Moncton.

Their lobbying efforts were ultimately useless: the bill was soundly defeated.

My mother gave me one good piece of advice: to avoid wasting time and energy worrying about things I cannot change.

## When Not to Use a Colon

You should not place a colon between a [verb](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/verbs.html#verb) and its [object](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/objcompl.html#object) or [subject complement](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/objcompl.html#subject%20complement), or between a [preposition](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/preposit.html#preposition) and its object:

[WRONG] His neighbour lent him: a pup-tent, a wooden canoe, and a slightly battered Coleman stove. (colon between verb and objects)

[RIGHT] His neighbour lent him a pup-tent, a wooden canoe, and a slightly battered Coleman stove.

[WRONG] Her three goals are: to improve her public speaking skills, to increase her self-confidence and to sharpen her sales techniques. (colon between verb and subject complement)

[RIGHT] Her three goals are to improve her public speaking skills, to increase her self-confidence and to sharpen her sales techniques.

[WRONG] We travelled to: London, Wales and Scotland. (colon between preposition and objects)

[RIGHT] We travelled to London, Wales and Scotland.

# End Punctuation

The [punctuation](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/punct.html#punctuation) marks that signal the end of a [sentence](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/subjpred.html#sentence) are the period, the question mark and the exclamation mark.

You use the **period**, by far the most common of the **end punctuation** marks, to terminate a sentence that makes a statement. You may also use periods with **imperative sentences** that have no sense of urgency or excitement attached:

Without a doubt, Lady Emily was much happier after her divorce.

Turn right at the stop sign.

Bring me a cup of coffee and a cheese danish.

When you want to express a sense of urgency or very strong emotion, you may end your imperative sentences and statements with an **exclamation mark**:

Look out below!

Leave this house at once!

I hate him!

Exclamation marks are, however, rare in formal writing. Use them sparingly, if at all.

You should use the **question mark** at the end of a **direct question**:

Who's on first?

Where is my flowered cape?

Be careful not to use a question mark at the end of an [indirect question](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/sntpurps.html#indirect%20question). Indirect questions are simply statements, and therefore end with a period:

I wonder who was chosen as Harvest King in the county fair.

She asked if she could play pinball.

The teacher asked who was chewing gum.

# Quotation Marks

The exact rules for **quotation marks** vary greatly from language to language and even from country to country within the English-speaking world. In North American usage, you should place double quotation marks (") before and after directly quoted material and words of dialogue:

One critic ended his glowing review with this superlative: "It is simply the best film ever made about potato farming."

May replied, "This is the last cookie."

You also use quotation marks to set off certain titles, usually those of minor or short works -- essays, short stories, short poems, songs, articles in periodicals, etc. For titles of longer works and separate publications, you should use italics (or underlined, if italics are not available). Use italics for titles of books, magazines, periodicals, newspapers, films, plays, long poems, long musical works, and television and radio programs.

Once when I was sick, my father read me a story called "The Happy Flower," which was later made into a movie entitled Flower Child, starring Tiny Tim.

Sometimes, you will use quotation marks to set off words specifically referred to as terms, though some publishers prefer italics:

I know you like the word "unique," but do you really have to use it ten times in one essay?

"Well" is sometimes a noun, sometimes an adverb, sometimes an adjective and sometimes a verb.

## Quotations Marks with Other Punctuation

One question that frequently arises with quotation marks is where to place other punctuation marks in relation to them. Again, these rules vary from region to region, but North American usage is quite simple:

1. [Commas](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/comma.html#comma) and [periods](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/endpunct.html#period) always go inside the quotation marks.

I know you are fond of the story "Children of the Corn," but is it an appropriate subject for your essay?

"At last," said the old woman, "I can say I am truly happy."

1. [Semicolons](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/semicoln.html#semicolon) and [colons](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/colon.html#colon) always go outside the quotation marks.

She never liked the poem "Dover Beach"; in fact, it was her least favourite piece of Victorian literature.

He clearly states his opinion in the article "Of Human Bondage": he believes that television has enslaved and diminished an entire generation.

1. [Question marks](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/endpunct.html#question%20mark), [exclamation marks](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/endpunct.html#exclamation%20mark), and [dashes](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/dash.html#dash) go inside quotation marks when they are part of the quotation, and outside when they do not.

Where is your copy of "The Raven"?

"How cold is it outside?" my mother asked.

Note that in North American usage, you should use single quotation marks (') only to set off quoted material (or a minor title) inside a quotation.

"I think she said `I will try,' not `I won't try,'" explained Sandy.

# The Apostrophe

You should use an **apostrophe** to form the [possessive case](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/nounchar.html#possessive%20case) of a [noun](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/nouns.html#noun) or to show that you have left out letters in a **contraction**. Note that you should not generally use contractions in formal, academic writing.

The convertible's engine has finally died. (The noun "convertible's" is in the possessive case)

I haven't seen my roommate for two weeks. (The verb "haven't" is a contraction of "have not")

To form the possessive of a [plural](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/nounchar.html#plural) noun ending in "s," simply place an apostrophe after the "s."

He has his three sons' futures in mind.

In many suburbs, the houses' designs are too much alike.

[Possessive pronouns](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/pronouns.html#possessive%20pronoun) -- for example, "hers," "yours," and "theirs" -- do not take apostrophes. This is the case for the possessive pronoun "its" as well: when you write "it's" with an apostrophe, you are writing a contraction for "it is."

The spaceship landed hard, damaging its radar receiver. ("its" is the possessive pronoun)

It's your mother on the phone. ("it's" is the contraction of "it is")

# The Dash

As noted in the section on [commas](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/comma.html#comma), you can use a **dash** at the beginning and end of [parenthetical information](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/comma.html#parenthetical%20information). Usually, you will use dashes when you want to emphasise the information, but you might also use them if the parenthetical information is too long or abrupt to be set off with commas.

I think you would look fine wearing either the silk blouse -- the one with the blue pattern -- or the angora sweater. (abrupt interruption)

The idea of returning to the basics in the classroom -- a notion which, incidentally, has been quietly supported for years by many respected teachers -- is finally gaining some currency with school administrators. (lengthy interruption containing internal commas)

You can use a dash to conclude a list of elements, focusing them all toward one point.

Chocolate, cream, honey and peanut butter -- all go into this fabulously rich dessert.

Dashes also mark sharp turns in thought.

We pored over exotic, mouth-watering menus from Nemo Catering, Menu du Jour, Taste Temptations, and three other reputable caterers -- and rejected them all.