**Punctuation, Abbreviations, and Numbers**

**End Punctuation: Period, Exclamation Point, and Question Mark**

Use a period at the end of a declarative sentence and at the end of a polite command.

Nadine Gordimer won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991**.**

Think of another author from Africa who won the Nobel Prize**.**

Use an exclamation point to show strong feeling and indicate a forceful command.

What a fabulous book**!** Read it**!**

Use a question mark to indicate a direct question.

Did Wole Soyinka of Nigeria win the Nobel Prize in Literature**?**

A declarative sentence containing an indirect question does not take a question mark.

Juanita asked if Naguib Mahfouz from Egypt had also won the prize**.**

**Colons**

Use a **colon** to introduce a list, especially after a statement that uses such words as *these, the following,* or *as follows.*

To bake the cookies you will need **these** ingredients**:** flour, sugar, butter, chocolate chips, baking powder, eggs, vanilla, and pecans.

Do not use a colon if a list immediately follows a verb or a preposition.

Elvis Presley’s hit singles **include** “Heartbreak Hotel,” “Hound Dog,” and “Love Me Tender.”

Use a colon to introduce material that illustrates, restates, or explains the preceding material. A complete sentence following a colon is usually not capitalized.

The Cleveland Browns, Phoenix Cardinals, and Seattle Seahawks have one thing in common**: t**hey have never played in the Super Bowl.

Use colons to introduce a long or formal quotation.

Eudora Welty’s famous short story “Why I Live at the P.O.” begins with the following words**:** “I was getting along fine with Mama, Papa-Daddy, and Uncle Rondo until my sister Stella-Rondo just separated from her husband and came back home again.”

Quotations of poetry that are longer than one line and quotations of prose that are longer than five lines are generally written below the introductory statement and indented on the page.

William Wordsworth’s poem “Tintern Abbey” contains these prayer-like words**:**

While with an eye made quiet by the power of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

We see into the life of things.

Use a colon between the hour and minute of the precise time, between the chapter and verse in biblical references, and the salutation of a business letter.

4**:**12 A.M. 9**:**03 P.M. Job 3**:**11 Dear Sir or Madam**:**

**Semicolons**

Use a **semicolon** to separate main clauses that are not joined by a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, yet* and *for*).

The English word *salary* has an interesting history**;** based on the Latin word for “salt,” it comes from the fact that Roman soldiers were paid money to buy salt.

Use a semicolon to separate main clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb (such as *however, therefore, nevertheless, moreover, furthermore,* and *consequently*) or by an expression such as *for example* or *that is*. In general a conjunctive adverb or expression such as *in fact, for example,* or *that is* is followed by a comma.

Which state has the most interesting and unusual place names would be a lively debate**; however,** Maine, with names such as Passamaquoddy, would certainly be in the running.

Use a semicolon to separate the items in a series when these items contain commas.

Interestingly, three important twentieth-century American poets who held jobs outside of literature are William Carlos Williams, a doctor**;** Wallace Stevens, an insurance company executive; and T. S. Eliot, a banker.

Use a semicolon to separate two main clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction when such clauses already contain several commas.

India is perhaps best known for its masses of poor people living on the edge of disaster, one meal away from starvation**;** but it must also be remembered as the world’s largest, liveliest democracy, where, in spite of its immense difficulties, it manages to maintain electoral freedom for the most people of any country on Earth.

**Commas and Compound Sentences**

Use **commas** between the main clauses in a compound sentence. Place a comma before a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, yet,* or *for*) that joins two main clauses.

Irish playwright John Millington Synge is known for his dramas about rural Irish life, and his play *The Playboy of the Western World* has become a classic.

You may omit the comma between very short main clauses that are connected by a coordinating conjunction, unless the comma is needed to avoid confusion.

Jose opened the refrigerator and he took out the peanut butter. (clear)

Jose opened the refrigerator and the peanut butter fell on the floor. (confusing)

Jose opened the refrigerator, and the peanut butter fell on the floor. (clear)

**Commas in a Series and Between Coordinate Adjectives**

Use **commas** to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses in a series when they are not connected by conjunctions.

The lights blinked**,** flickered**,** and went out.

Shelley bought soft drinks**,** potato chips**,** and gingersnaps for the party.

I checked the windows**,** Denise pulled the curtains**,** and Dad turned out the lights.

Do not use commas to separate nouns used in pairs (*thunder and lightning, salt and pepper, bread and butter*) that are considered single units. The paired nouns are set offfrom other nouns or groups of nouns in a series, however.

The weather forecast called for cooler temperatures**,** thunder and lightning**,** and showers starting tonight.

Place a comma between coordinate adjectives that precede a noun. **Coordinate adjectives** modify a noun equally. To discover whether adjectives are coordinate, reverse their orderor put the word *and* between them. If the sentence still sounds natural, the adjectives arecoordinate.

The tall**,** thin**,** red-haired player on the other team was really good.

If adjectives preceding a noun sound unnatural with their order reversed or with *and* between them, do not use commas. Generally, adjectives that describe size, shape, age,and material do not need to be separated by commas.

Mindy painted a big round face on the mural.

**Commas with Nonessential Elements, Interjections, Parenthetical Expressions, and Conjunctive Adverbs**

Use **commas** to set off participles, infinitives, appositives, and their phrases if they are not essential to the meaning of the sentence. If they are essential to the meaning, do not set them off with commas.

He smiled broadly**,** waiting for teammates to congratulate him. (nonessential participial phrase)

To go on every one of the club’s hikes is my goal. (As the subject of the sentence, the infinitive phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence.)

Twain’s novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* also takes place on and along the Mississippi River. (If commas were used to set off the essential appositive, *The* *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* the implication would be that this was Twain’s only novel, which is not the case.)

Use commas to set off a nonessential adjective clause, but do not use commas to set off an adjective clause that is essential.

Madison**,** which is in the south-central part of the state**,** is the capital of Wisconsin.

(*Which is in the south-central part of the state* is extra information.)

Tourists who are not fond of cold weather should think twice about vacationing in

Alaska. (*Who are not fond of cold weather* is essential to the meaning.)

Use commas to set off interjections (such as *oh* and *well*), parenthetical expressions (such as *on the contrary, in fact,* and *on the other hand*), and conjunctive adverbs (such as *however, moreover,* and *consequently*).

Well, I guess that’s the end. I hope we play better tomorrow, however.

**Commas and Introductory Phrases**

Use a **comma** after a short introductory prepositional phrase only if the sentence would be misread without the comma.

In the barn, cats hunt for mice. (The comma is needed to prevent misreading.)

In the barn we store hay and farm equipment. (comma not needed)

Use a comma after a long prepositional phrase or after the final phrase in a succession of phrases.

At the bottom of the painting in the first room, I saw the artist’s signature.

At the bottom of the painting in the first room was the artist’s signature.

Use commas to set off introductory participles and participial phrases.

Singing, the protesters marched down the street.

Scampering quickly across the road, the groundhog avoided the car.

Do not use a comma if the phrase is immediately followed by a verb.

**Commas and Adverb Clauses and Antithetical Phrases**

Use **commas** to set off all introductory adverb clauses and to set off internal adverb clauses that interrupt the flow of a sentence. Generally, do not set off an adverb clause at the end of a sentence unless the clause is parenthetical or it would be misread without the comma.

Since the concert had already started**,** we had to wait in the lobby.

David**,** after he had been accepted into the program, threw his hat into the air and whooped!

Dad was disappointed because he had to miss my softball game.

Use commas to set off an antithetical phrase. In an **antithetical phrase** a word such as *not* or *unlike* qualifies what precedes it.

Melanie**, unlike** her brothers, enjoys sports.

**Commas with Titles, Addresses, and Numbers**

Use **commas** to set off titles when they follow a person’s name.

Benazir Bhutto**,** prime minister of Pakistan**,** visited the White House yesterday.

Use commas after the various parts of an address, a geographical term, or a date.

The advertisement said that entries should be sent to Sweepstakes, 440 Park Avenue South**,** New York**,** NY 10016.

When my aunt was in the Peace Corps**,** she worked in Ouagadougou**,** Burkina Faso.

Abraham Lincoln was shot on April 14**,** 1865, and died the next morning.

A comma is not used when only the month and the day or the month and the year are given.

In July 1776 the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia.

July 4 has become the American national holiday.

Use commas to set off the parts of a reference that direct the reader to the exact source.

The Drama Club performed Act 5**,** Scene ii**,** of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth.*

You’ll find the answer to that question in Part Three**,** Chapter 89**,** page 768.

**Commas with Direct Address, Tag Questions, and Letter Writing**

Use **commas** to set off words or names used in direct address.

Mom**,** would you like to attend my high school graduation dinner with me?

Hey**,** man**,** that’s an incredibly cool guitar!

Thank you for your help**,** Mr. Chang.

Use commas to set off a tag question.

I didn’t see you at Computer Universe yesterday**,** did I?

Marshall ate all the cashews**,** didn’t he?

Place a comma after the salutation of an informal letter and after the closing of all letters.

Dear Uncle Alex**,** Dear Stacey**,** Love**,** Sincerely**,**

Use the following style for the heading of a letter:

1908 Coventry Avenue

Alexandria, Virginia 22314

September 6, 1995

**Misuse of Commas**

A **comma** should not precede a conjunction that connects the parts of a compound predicate when the predicate has only two parts.

Incorrect: Copenhagen and Stockholm are the largest cities in Scandinavia, but are not nearly as large as London or Paris.

Correct: Copenhagen and Stockholm are the largest cities in Scandinavia but are not nearly as large as London or Paris.

An error called a run-on sentence (or a comma splice or a comma fault) occurs when only a comma is used to join two main clauses that are not part of a series. To avoid run-on sentences, use a coordinating conjunction with the comma, or use a semicolon.

Incorrect: The capitals of Denmark and Sweden are port cities, ships from every country call at their harbors.

Correct: The capitals of Denmark and Sweden are port cities**, and** ships from every country call at their harbors.

Correct: The capitals of Denmark and Sweden are port cities**;** ships from every country call at their harbors.

A comma should never be used between a subject and its verb or between a verb and its complement.

Incorrect: Which of the two cities is more appealing, is up to the individual traveler to decide.

Correct: Which of the two cities is more appealing is up to the individual traveler to decide.

Incorrect: The Scandinavian countries include, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland.

Correct: The Scandinavian countries include Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland.

**Dashes to Signal Change and to Emphasize**

On a typewriter, indicate the **dash** with two hyphens (**--**). Do not place a comma, semicolon, colon, or period before or after a dash. Use a dash to indicate an abrupt break or change in thought within a sentence.

At the museum in Williamsburg, we saw a pillory**—**it is a kind of wooden frame that held the arms and head of wrongdoers**—**that had been built around 1695.

Use a dash to set off and emphasize supplemental information or parenthetical statements.

Mr. Davidson left on his trip to Denmark last Friday**—**exactly 20 years to the day after he first saw his ancestral home.

**Parentheses, Brackets, and Ellipsis Points**

Use **parentheses** to set off supplemental material that is not meant to be part of the main statement.

Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system is 88,000 miles (about 140,000 kilometers) in diameter.

Generally, a comma, a semicolon, or a colon appears *after* the closing parenthesis. A period, a question mark, or an exclamation point appears *inside* the parentheses if it is part of the parenthetical expression but *outside* the closing parenthesis if it is part of the sentence.

The author in the photo was Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980), author of the novel *Ship of Fools*.

Be sure to look for the sign (is it blue or green**?**) above the door of the hobby shop.

Have you read “The Musgrave Ritual” (the fifth of eleven Sherlock Holmes stories in the book)**?**

Use **brackets** to enclose information that you insert into a quotation from someone else’s work in order to clarify the quotation.

“His **[**Daniel Day-Lewis’s**]** performance as Christy Brown, the Irish writer with cerebral palsy, won an Academy Award in 1989.”

Use brackets to enclose a parenthetical phrase that already appears within parentheses.

Robert James Waller’s first novel (*The Bridges of Madison County* **[**the action takes place in the author’s home state of Iowa**]**) is one of the highest-selling hardcover novels of all time.

Use a series of equally spaced points, called **ellipsis points**, to indicate the omission of material from a quotation. If the omission occurs at the beginning of a sentence, use three spaced points. Use the correct punctuation (if any) plus three spaced points if the omission occurs in the middle or at the end of the sentence. In using a period plus three spaced points, do not leave any space between the last word before the omission and the first point, the period.

. . . It was clear to me . . . that Saddam Hussein was quite prepared to suffer a great deal. . . . Meanwhile Kuwait was being destroyed.

—Gen. Colin Powell

**Quotation Marks for Direct Quotations**

Use **quotation marks** to enclose a direct quotation. In general, separate introductory or explanatory remarks from the quotation with a comma.

“Once you’ve seen Niagara Falls, you’ll never forget its awesome power,” my grandfather said solemnly.

Grandmother added with a laugh, “I agree with you, dear, but when we were there, you complained the whole time about the roar!”

When a quotation is interrupted by explanatory words such as *he said* or *she wrote,* use two sets of quotation marks. Begin the second part of the quotation with a capital letter if it is a complete sentence.

“Notre Dame, Michigan, and Alabama are the teams,” said the coach, “with the best records in college football.”

“Alabama coach Bear Bryant has won the most games,” she continued. “He won 323 games in his career.”

Never use quotation marks in an indirect quotation (a quotation that does not repeat a person’s exact words).

Original quotation: “I don’t care about your horrid little frog,” Valerie screeched.

Indirect quotation: Valerie screeched that she didn’t care about the horrid little frog.

Use single quotation marks around a quotation within a quotation.

During the discussion, he said, “Remember that she ends the novel by stating, ‘The land went slowly back to pasture and then to forest. In a hundred years, no one knew it had ever existed.’”

In writing dialogue, begin a new paragraph and use a new set of quotation marks every time the speaker changes.

“What do you feel like doing?” Mark asked when we had all gathered at the corner.

“How about we go shoot some hoops at the playground,” suggested Khalid.

“We could do that—if we had a basketball,” answered Mark.

**Quotation Marks: Other Uses**

Use **quotation marks** to enclose the titles of short works, such as short stories, short poems, essays, newspaper and magazine articles, book chapters, songs, and single episodes of a television series.

**“**Peasants**”** (short story) **“**The Green Jaguar**”** (chapter)

**“**Tintern Abbey**”** (poem) **“**Poor Wandering One**”** (song title)

**“**Stay Fit with Exercise**”** (article) **“**Fall Into Life**”** (essay)

**“**A Holiday Celebration**”** (episode of a television series)

Use quotation marks to enclose unfamiliar slang and other unusual or original expressions.

When she was little, my sister wouldn’t go anywhere without her **“**bunkie,**”** a dreadfully ratty old blanket that she loved dearly.

Use quotation marks to enclose a definition that is stated directly.

*Smorgasbord* is the Swedish word meaning **“**sandwich table.**”**

Always place a comma or a period *inside* closing quotation marks.

**“**Can’t Explain**,” “**I Can See for Miles**,”** and **“**Happy Jack**”** were three of the Who’s early hit songs.

Always place a colon or a semicolon *outside* closing quotation marks.

Mom pointed out why I should read the article “Organizing Your Life”**:** my room is a total mess.

Place the question mark or exclamation point *inside* the closing quotation marks when it is part of the quotation.

My favorite song from the musical *Oliver* is “Where Is Love**?**”

Place the question mark or exclamation point *outside* the closing quotation marks when it is part of the entire sentence.

Have you ever read the short story “To Build a Fire”**?**

If both the sentence and the quotation at the end of the sentence need a question mark (or an exclamation point), use only one punctuation mark and place it *inside* the closing quotation marks.

Who called and asked “Would you like to go to the soccer game?”

**Italics (Underlining)**

Italic type is a special slanted type. (*This is printed in italics.*) **Italics** is indicated on a typewriter or with handwriting by underlining. (This is underlined.) Most computer word processing programs can print italic type.

Italicize (underline) titles of books, lengthy poems, plays, films and television series, paintings and sculptures, long musical compositions, and court cases. Also italicize the names of newspapers and magazines, ships, trains, airplanes, and spacecraft.

*Bleak House* (novel) *Song of Myself* (long poem)

*Twelfth Night* (play) *American Gothic* (painting)

*Gaslight* (film) *Mad About You* (television series)

*The Thinker* (sculpture) *Rigoletto* (musical work)

*Detroit Free Press* (newspaper) H.M.S. *Bounty* (ship)

*Marbury* v. *Madison* (court case) *Challenger* (spacecraft)

Italicize (underline) and capitalize articles (*a, an, the*) written at the beginning of a title only when they are part of the title itself. It is common practice not to italicize (underline) the article preceding the title of a newspaper or magazine. Do not italicize the word *magazine* unless it is a part of the title of the periodical.

*A Winter’s Tale* a *Time* magazine cover

In forming the possessive of italicized titles, do not italicize the apostrophe and *-s*.

*Sports Illustrated*’s article *Macbeth*’s plot

Italicize (underline) foreign words and expressions that are not used frequently in English. If foreign words and phrases are commonly used in English, do not italicize them.

In the Italian restaurant the waiter asked if I wanted my ham *cotto* or *crudo.*

Italicize (underline) words, letters, and numerals used to represent themselves.

Dina’s handwriting is hard to read because her *g* looks just like her *s*.

**The Apostrophe**

Use an **apostrophe** and *-s* for the possessive of a singular indefinite pronoun. Do not use an apostrophe with any other possessive pronouns.

everyone**’s** duty one**’s** own recipe whose car its paw

Use an apostrophe and *-s* to form the possessive of a singular noun, even one that ends in *-s.*

the boy**’s** mountain bike the fox**’s** tail the glass**’s** rim

Use an apostrophe alone to form the possessive of a plural noun that ends in *-s.* Use an apostrophe and *-s* if the plural does not end in *-s.* Do not use an apostrophe to form the plural of a date.

the Lions**’** meeting children**’s** literature the 1950s

Put only the last word of a compound noun in the possessive form.

the secretary of state**’s** speech her mother-in-law**’s** house

If two or more persons (or partners in a company) possess something jointly, use the possessive for the last person named. If two or more persons (or companies) possess an item (or items) individually, put each one’s name in the possessive form. Procter and Gamble**’s** products Gibson**’s** and Fender**’s** guitars

Use a possessive form to express amounts of money or time that modify a noun. The modifier can also be expressed as a hyphenated adjective, in which case the possessive form is not used.

three hours**’** time a three-hour trip

Use an apostrophe in place of letters omitted in contractions and in place of the omitted numerals of a particular year.

you**’**re = you + are the class of **’**96

Use an apostrophe and *-s* to form the plural of letters, numerals, symbols, and words used to represent themselves. Italicize (underline) only the letter, numeral, symbol, or word.

His *n***’s** look exactly like his *u***’s**. This page is full of *@***’s**, not letters.

**The Hyphen**

Ordinarily a **hyphen** is not used to join a prefix to a word. Exceptions are as follows:

Use a hyphen after any prefix joined to a proper noun or a proper adjective. Also use a hyphen after the prefixes *all-, ex-* (meaning “former”), and *self-* joined to any noun or adjective. pro**-**Canadian ex**-**governor all**-**knowing self**-**awareness

Generally, hyphens are used to avoid confusion, such as between words beginning with *re-* that could be mistaken for another word different in meaning and pronunciation. Also use a hyphen to separate the prefix *anti-* when it joins a word beginning with *i-.* Always hyphenate the prefix *vice-* and any succeeding word, except in *vice president.*

re**-**creation of a historical scene outdoor recreation anti**-**industrialism vice**-**mayor

Use a hyphen in a compound adjective that precedes a noun. When compound adjectives beginning with *well, ill,* or *little* are modified by an adverb, they are usually not hyphenated. An expression made up of an adverb ending in *-ly* and an adjective is not hyphenated.

a dark**-**colored hat The hat was dark coloured.

a well**-**known musician a very well known musician

a poorly written play a tightly packed container

Hyphenate any spelled-out cardinal or ordinal number up to ninety-nine or ninety-ninth.

Hyphenate a fraction used as an adjective (but not one used as a noun).

a two**-**thirds vote two thirds of the voters

Hyphenate two numerals to indicate a span. When you use the word *from* before a span,

use *to* rather than a hyphen. When you use *between,* use *and.*

pages 568**-**643 1914**-**1918 **from** 1914 **to** 1918 **between** 12:00 **and** 1:45

In general divide words at the ends of lines between syllables or pronounceable parts.

Consult a dictionary if necessary.

light**-**ning clip**-**per sell**-**ing tast**-**ier scorn**-**ful short**-**est

**Abbreviations**

Use only one period if an **abbreviation** occurs at the end of a sentence that would normally take a period of its own. If an abbreviation occurs at the end of a sentence that ends with a question mark or an exclamation point, use the period and the second punctuation mark.

Danitra left at 9:00 **P.M.** Did you read the article by Felicia Martinez, **M.D.**?

Use all capital letters and no periods for abbreviations that are pronounced letter by letter or as words. Exceptions are U.S. and Washington, D.C., which do use periods.

NBA EPA AIDS ACT OSHA

Use the abbreviations A.M. (*ante meridiem,* “before noon”) and P.M. (*post meridiem,* “after noon”) for exact times. For dates use B.C. (before Christ) and, sometimes, A.D. (*anno* *Domini,* “in the year of the Lord,” after Christ.)

Use abbreviations for personal titles appearing before names and for those titles indicating professional and academic degrees. When abbreviating a person’s first and middle names, leave a space after each initial. When using three initials, use no periods and leave no spaces between initals.

**L. L.** Bean **Maj.** Susan Jones **Rev.** Robert Davis **Jr.** Anna Wang, **Ph.D. JFK**

Abbreviate units of measure used with numerals in technical or scientific writing. Do not abbreviate units of measure in ordinary prose, however. These abbreviations stand for plural as well as singular units. Metric abbreviations do not require periods.

**mm** millimeter **oz.** ounce **kg** kilogram **m** meter **tsp.** teaspoon **lb.** pound **km** kilometer **in.** inch **1** liter **yd.** yard **qt.** quart **g** gram

**Numbers and Numerals**

Spell out any **number** that occurs at the beginning of a sentence. Also spell out cardinal and ordinal numbers that can be written in one or two words. Numbers written in more than two words are usually expressed in **numerals** (numbers expressed in figures). A very large number can be written as a numeral followed by a noun of amount, such as *million* or *billion.*

**Three hundred and sixty-four** people signed up for the home energy audit.

Mars has **two** moons, Deimos and Phobos.

The earth’s population is now thought to be about **5.8 billion** people.

If related numbers appear in the same sentence and some can be written out while others should appear as numerals, use all numerals.

More than **350** entries were received, but only **12** were selected for the final round of judging.

Use numerals to express decimals, percentages, and amounts of money involving both dollars and cents. Write out amounts of money that can be written in one or two words.

Multiply that sum by **$2.78** to get the right answer.

Dad paid **thirty-nine** cents a pound for these slightly bruised peaches.

Use numerals to express the year and the day, to express the precise time, and with the abbreviations A.M. and P.M. Spell out expressions of time that are approximate or that do not use the abbreviations A.M. or P.M.

Author Maxine Hong Kingston was born on October **27, 1940,** in Stockton, California.

Volunteers should meet at the shelter house at around **nine** o’clock in the morning.

To express a century when the word *century* is used, spell out the number. To express a decade when the century is clear from the context, spell out the number. When a century and a decade are expressed as a single unit, use numerals followed by an *-s.*

These coins were used in the **fourth** century!

Buddy Holly was one of the superstars of rock and roll in the **fifties.**

According to the author, the modern world was born during the decade of the **1820s.**

Use numerals for streets and avenues numbered above ten and for all house, apartment, and room numbers. Spell out numbered streets and avenues with a number of ten or under.

I think this dog belongs to the woman in Apartment **12G** on **Third** Avenue.