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COMMAS

SEPARATE AND ENCLOSE PHRASES AND CLAUSES

WITH COORDINATE CONJUNCTIONS

AND, BUT, OR, NOR, FOR, SO, YET

- **SEPARATE MAIN CLAUSES WITHIN A SENTENCE.**

1. May counsels students, **and** she volunteers at the local hospital.
2. John planned to invest his tax return, **but** he bought a computer instead.
3. Doug will play the game, **or** he will mow the lawn.
4. I don't smoke, **nor** do I eat near people who smoke.
5. Sandra won't be going with us, **for** she returned her application too late.
6. The bank lowered its interest rates, **so** we decided to refinance our mortgage.
7. I haven't seen the new house, **yet** I know how to get there.

- **DO NOT USE COMMAS BEFORE CONJUNCTIONS THAT LINK PHRASES OTHER THAN COMPLETE SENTENCES.**

1. Mary counsels students and delivers meals to shut-ins.
2. Two inches of snow and a glazing of ice covered the streets.

WITH INTRODUCTORY ELEMENTS

- **COMMAS SEPARATE ELEMENTS THAT INTRODUCE AND MODIFY SENTENCES**

- After looking at several cars, Michael decided on a sporty model.

- **COMMAS CAN BE OMITTED AFTER SHORT INTRODUCTORY ELEMENTS IF THERE IS NO RISK OF MISREADING.**

After I moved I lost contact with my high school pals.

WITH OTHER ELEMENTS

- **DATES**

1. On **December 7, 1941**, Japanese war planes bombed Pearl Harbor.
2. On **7 December 1941**, Japanese warplanes bombed Pearl Harbor.
(*Notice that military dating does not require commas.*)
3. On **Wednesday, December 28, 1994**, I will celebrate my 30th birthday.

- **ADDRESSES AND PLACE NAMES**

- The President of the United States lives at **1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C.**

- **NUMBERS**

1. The city marina cost **\$8,479,000** to construct.
2. Jill's dress has over **2,500** hand-sewn beads.
(**With four digit numbers, commas are optional.**)
3. Martin planted **1500** marigold plants.

• QUOTATIONS

Commas ordinarily separate a quotation from its source, such as *as he said or she said*.

1. John F. Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”
2. “Sometimes love is stronger than a man’s convictions,” wrote Isaac Bashevis Singer.
3. “I never forget a face,” said Groucho Marx, “but in your case I’ll make an exception.”

• PARENTHETICAL EXPRESSIONS

John’s new car, in my opinion, is a lemon.

• NOUNS OF DIRECT ADDRESS

- Adam, do you want to plant the palms this afternoon?

• INTERJECTIONS

- Well, that about does it for today.

• DO NOT USE A COMMA WITH IDENTIFYING WORDS THAT INTERRUPT MAIN CLAUSES IN A QUOTATION.

- Don’t speak to me “she sighed. “your words are meaningless”

WITH ADJECTIVES

• COORDINATE ADJECTIVES MODIFY NOUNS SEPARATELY.

1. We felt the **salty, humid** air near the beach.
2. Martha created a **three- tiered, white, flower covered** wedding cake for Jason and Renee.

• COORDINATE ADJECTIVES:

can be joined with and (salty and humid; three- tiered and white and flower covered), and their positions can be changed without altering the meaning of the sentence.

• CUMULATIVE ADJECTIVES DO NOT REQUIRE A COMMA.

1. Adam bought **two tall** palms.
2. I found a shard from an **ancient Greek** run.
3. Marissa planned an **amazingly detailed, truly exotic** Halloween costume.

(*The are two sets of cumulative adjectives in this sentence that function separately to modify “costume”.*)

• ADDING COMMAS TO A STRING OF CUMULATIVE ADJECTIVES OR CHANGING THEIR ORDER RESULTS IN AN AWKWARD CONSTRUCTION.

1. Adam bought **two, tall** palms.
2. Adam bought **tall, two** palms.

WITH NONRESTRICTIVE PHRASES AND APPOSITIVES

• NONRESTRICTIVE ELEMENTS CAN BE OMITTED WITHOUT CHANGING MEANING.

1. Frank’s new **aquarium, a marine tank, hosts** brilliant coral and brightly colored fish.
2. Awakened by a strange **noise, Alan** wondered if he remembered to lock the door when he went to bed.

(*“Marine tank” and “Awakened by a strange noise” are not absolutely necessary to the meaning of the sentences.*)

• DO NOT USE COMMAS TO SET OFF RESTRICTIVE ELEMENTS.

1. The first house on the left is for sale.

(*The phrase “on the left” is essential to the meaning of the sentence.*)

2. Those people who have already purchased tickets may enter the theater now.
(*“ Who have already purchased tickets” is essential to the meaning of the sentence.*)

WITH PARALLEL WORDS, PHRASES, AND APPOSITIVES

1. The department store offered **a suit, a shirt, and a tie** for one low price.
2. The kitten stalked the ball of yarn **behind the curtain, over the television, and under the table.**
3. Marie offered her students a treat if they **would complete their assignment, if they would clean their desks, and if they would stack their books neatly.**

COMMA MISUSES

MISREADINGS & OMISSIONS

- **USE COMMAS TO PREVENT MISREADINGS AND TO CLARIFY MEANING IN A SENTENCE .**

1. **To Susan**, Jason’s choice of costume was unacceptable.
2. **As soon as we left**, Marilyn closed the store.

- **COMMAS CAN INDICATE AN OMISSION:**

- Helen bought a new television ; Mark, a laser printer; and Sarah . a stereo system.

UNNECESSARY COMMAS

- **UNNECESSARY COMMAS CAN BE AS CONFUSING AS LEAVING OUT REQUIRED COMMAS.**

(*For instance, if you separate a subject and verb or an adjective and the word it modifies with a comma, your reader will have to spend time figuring out which ideas go together.*)

NOT *Billy and Marcia, built a log home.*

BUT *Billy and Marcia, built a log home.*

- **DO NOT PLACE A COMMA BEFORE A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION AND A PHRASE (see “ With Coordinate Conjunctions”).**

NOT *After school Samuel likes to finish his home work, and watch TV for a few hours.*

BUT *After school Samuel likes to finish his homework and watch TV for a few hours.*

OR *After school Samuel likes to finish his homework, and then he spends a few hours watching TV.*

(*Notice that in the first example, the comma separates a compound verb rather than two independent clauses.*)

SEMICOLONS

- **JOIN RELATED MAIN CLAUSES WHEN A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION IS NOT USED.**

1. I will not paint the house; **you can’t make me.**
2. Sally built a tree house; **she painted it blue.**

(*Main clauses joined with a comma constitute a comma splice. Use a semicolon or separate the clauses into two complete sentences.*)

- **WORK WITH CONJUNCTIVE ADVERBS TO JOIN MAIN CLAUSES.**

1. I would like to go to the museum with you; **however**, I must visit my dentist instead.
2. Jim had given much thought to his future; **therefore**, it came as no surprise when he returned to school.
3. The audience was sparse; **in fact**, there were only five people.
4. I want to travel this summer; **accordingly**, I will have to save money this winter.
5. Six people saw the bandit leaving the store; **moreover**, one customer even got his tag number.

- **SEPARATE ITEMS IN SERIES THAT CONTAIN COMMAS.**

- I packed my suitcase with **old, comfortable jeans; rugged, warm sweaters; and new, freshly starched shirts.**

- **DO NOT USE SEMICOLONS TO SEPARATE UNPARALLEL ITEMS.**

NOT *Before starting the engine; Bill cleaned the windshield.*

BUT *Before starting the engine, Bill cleaned the windshield.*

This sentence is made up of a dependent clause and an **independent clause**; therefore, the sentence does not require a semi-colon to separate the clauses. One comma will do.

- **SEPARATE COORDINATE CLAUSES WHEN THEY ARE JOINED BY TRANSITIONAL WORDS AND PHRASES SUCH AS:**

accordingly	afterwards	again
besides	consequently	doubtless
eventually	evidently	furthermore
however	moreover	nevertheless
otherwise	perhaps	therefore
for example	for instance	in addition

COLONS

END MAIN CLAUSES& INTRODUCE ADDITIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

- **BASIC EXAMPLES**

1. Frank introduced four kinds of fish into his new aquarium: three angels, six tetras, a pair of Bala sharks, and a spotted catfish.
2. After a few months, Frank encountered a problem with his new aquarium set-up: algae growth.
3. Tamara suggested a solution: “ I keep quite a few snails in my aquarium. They eat the excess algae”.

- **DO NOT FUNCTION INSIDE A MAIN CLAUSE:**

NOT *Frank's favorite fish is: the angel fish.*

BUT *Frank's favorite fish is the angel fish.*

- **LINK INDEPENDENT CLAUSES WHEN THE SECOND MODIFIES THE FIRST.**

Frank learned a serious lesson about aquarium maintenance: do not overfeed fish as this causes the water to cloud.

(*The reader wants an explanation of the “important lesson,” which is provided in the second clause.*)

- **OTHER USES**

1. Business letter salutation – **Dear Mr. Brown:**
2. Title and subtitle – **Dudes: My Story**
3. Biblical citation – **Genesis1:1**
4. Bibliographic entries – **Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.**

APOSTROPHES SHOW POSSESSION

- **ADD “ ’S “ TO FORM THE POSSESSIVE of singular and plural nouns and indefinite pronouns that do not end in s or a z sound.**

1. My **mother’s** purse held many treasures.
(*the purse owned by my mother*)
2. Can **anyone’s** dog enter the Kennel show?
(*dog is owned by anyone*)
3. **The women’s** League is very active.
(*the possessive form of women, a plural, take an ’s*)

- **ADD “ ’S “ TO FORM THE POSSESSIVE OF singular nouns ending in s or with an s or z sound.**

1. We listened to the stereo in **Chris’s** new car.
2. **Liz’s** dress was the sensation of the party.
(*add only an apostrophe if the extra [s] creates an awkward pronunciation*)
3. The Bible speaks admiringly of **Moses’** wisdom.

- **ADD ONLY AN APOSTROPHE to form the possessive of plural nouns ending in [s] or with an s or z sound.**

1. The **cats’** toys were spread around the room.
2. The latest car designs were engineered for **drivers’** comfort.

- **TO FORM THE POSSESSIVE OF COMPOUND NOUNS, add [’s] to only the last word.**

1. My **mother-in-law’s** furniture was imported from Havana.
2. Webster’s **brother-in-law’s** office was vandalized.

- **MAKE ONLY THE LAST NOUN POSSESSIVE to show joint possession.**

- **James and Susan’s** dog chased our cat.
(*the dog belongs to both James and Susan*)

- **MAKE BOTH NOUNS POSSESSIVE to show individual ownership.**

- **James’ and Susan’s** cars were both vandalized.

- **USE AN APOSTROPHE to form the plural of letters, numbers, and abbreviations.**

1. Phillip’s **t’s** look like his **i’s**.
2. We heard **bravo’s** throughout the arena.

- **USE AN APOSTROPHE to indicate contractions.**

1. **I’m ok’d** to enter the restricted zone.

2. The '92 hurricane left a wide swath of damage through the Miami area.
 3. Strangely enough , we never had the opportunity to try **fish'n' chips** while we were in London.
- **DO NOT USE AN APOSTROPHE WITH POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS.**
 - **Ours** is the bright red mustang. (Not “ Our's”)

QUOTATION MARKS

DIRECT& INDIRECT

- **ENCLOSE A DIRECT QUOTATION**

1. Martha whispered quietly, “ I ’m scared of the dark”
2. “when “ she breathed “ do we get out of here?”
3. “ what if we get stuck in this place? “ she asked.
4. “ I knew I should have taken up spelunking.”

- **CAPITALIZE THE FIRST WORD OF A DIRECT QUOTATION.**
 - **DO NOT CAPITALIZE THE FIRST WORD in the second part of an interrupted quotation unless the second part begins a new sentence.**
 - **INDIRECT QUOTATIONS DO NOT REQUIRE QUOTATION MARKS.**
- Father said that we should be frugal with our money.

ENCLOSE OTHER FORMS OF QUOTED MATERIAL

- **ARTICLE,ESSAY TITLES & SHORT STORIES**

- The current edition of *Vanity Fair* contains an article entitled, “ **Raider of the Lost Art.**”
(*Do not put quotation marks around title of your own compositions.*)

- **CHAPTER TITLES**

- Susan quoted from chapter three of Carole Jackson’s *Color Me beautiful* , “ **The Seasonal Palettes.**”

- **SONG TITLES**

- The Commodores’ “ **The Times a Lady**” was the number one hit when I graduated from high school.

- **MOST POEM TITLES**

- T.S. Eliot’s “ **The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock** ” remains a landmark poem of the 20th century.
(Longer poems, such as Eliot’s what Land, are underlined or italicized.)

- **TELEVISION AND RADIO EPISODE TITLES**

- More people saw “ **Going Home,**” the final episode of M.A.S.H., than any other television show to date.

- **SPECIAL PHRASES, WORDS, OR SENTENCES**

1. The phrase “ **rule of thumb**” has a violent history.
2. Marci pronounced “ **accept**” as “ **except.**”
3. The infamous declaration “ **Let them eat cake**” represents the arrogance of the French Aristocracy.

INDENTED QUOTES

- **DIRECT QUOTATIONS LONGER THAN FOUR TYPED LINES** are set off as block quotations by indenting ten spaces from the left margin and double spacing.

example: There are many reasons why a pond eco-system fails. For instance, industrial pollution might disrupt the “ natural bio-diversity of the system.”

Another problem, due in part to industrial pollution, is acid rain, which acidifies the pond system.

(Indented passage do not require quotation marks unless they appear within the text.)

WITH OTHER PUNCTUATION

- **THE PERIOD AND COMMA** are always placed inside the ending quotation marks.
- He said “ Let’s go to the beach today.”
- **THE QUESTION MARK AND EXCLAMATION POINT** are placed within the quotation marks only when they refer to the quoted material.
- Frank asked, “ When can I add fish to the tank?”

END PUNCTUATION

- **PERIODS END MOST SENTENCES IN ENGLISH**
- Mary asked us about selling her house.
- **POLITE REQUESTS** that do not require a “ yes” or “ no” answer should use a period.
- Would you please clean your room.
- **USE A PERIOD WITH MOST ABBREVIATIONS.**
- **Jan.**= January (Acronyms, such as IRS and CARE, do not require periods.)
- **QUESTION MARKS END DIRECT QUESTIONS.**
- Is Mary going to sell her house?
- **EXCLAMATION POINTS END EMPHATIC STATEMENTS.**
- No cigars! Put that out now!

OTHER PUNCTUATION

- **BRACKETS:** enclose editorial comments inserted within quoted material.
 - Machiavelli, the political pragmatist, argues that “princes [or anyone in a position of power] have accomplished most who paid little heed to keeping their promises.”
 - **PARENTHESES:** enclose supplemental information that is not necessary to the meaning of the sentence.
1. There are three sections to a thoughtfully composed essay : (1) the introduction, (2) the body, and (3) the conclusion.

2. *Hamlet and the Law of Desire* (1987) suggests that Shakespeare's famous tragedy is about the traditional rite of passage all boys go through as they mature into men.

• **DASHES**: (typed as two hyphens with no space before, between, or after) emphasize certain material within a sentence.

1. I would suggest ____or should I say argue____ that all aspects of the present economy must be changed.
2. Three members of the Board of Regents ____ even the newly appointed member ____ voted to reduce the education budget.
3. Adam's mother ____ a woman of high energy, intelligence, and wit ____ always hosts the best parties.

• **HYPHENS**: join words together and indicate a line break.

1. The **ill-fated** ship sank quickly.
2. The **editor-in-chief** checked the final draft.
3. The **player-King** delivered his lines expertly.
4. **Anti-smoking** lobbyists roamed the halls of the government building.

(*Line end hyphens break according to syllables.*)

• **SLASHES**: indicate options and unindented lines of poetry.

1. Please use your book **and/or** a calculator.
2. Good professors are true **teacher/scholars**.
3. Many children recognize these famous lines:
“ Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the **house/Not** a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.”

• **ELLIPSIS points** : indicate an omission from a direct quotation.

• “ Another **problem... is acid rain ...**”

(*Three spaced periods indicate an omission at the end of a direct quotation.*)

• **ITALICS**: indicate titles of books, magazines, newspapers, long plays, poems, etc.

1. My sister can recite passages from *Walden*.
 2. *Newsweek* is my favorite news magazine.
 3. Daniel bought a copy of the *L.A. Times*.
 4. Professor Briggs can read *Paradise Lost* in Italian (Alternately, you can underline titles.)
- Newsweek is my favorite news magazine.