

A Quick Guide to Punctuation

From the editors of

A Student's Guide to Writing College Papers by Kate L Turabian

Complete Sentences: Three Forms of End Punctuation

1. Period
Consider the advantages of this method.
2. Question Mark
Did you consider the advantages of this method?
3. Exclamation Point
Boy, am I surprised that you used this method!

Compound Sentences: Eight Ways to Punctuate Independent Clauses

1. Comma + Coordinate Conjunction
Students around the world want to learn English, and many young Americans are eager to teach them.
2. Semicolon
Students around the world want to learn English; many young Americans are eager to teach them.
3. Semicolon + Coordinate Conjunction
Although productivity per capita in U.S. industry is much greater than that in China, China has an increasingly well-educated young labor force; but the crucial point is that knowledge—which is transferable between peoples—has become the most important world economic resource.
4. Coordinate Conjunction (alone)
The senator arrived at noon and the president left at once.
5. Comma (alone)—Caution!
The senator arrived, the president left.
6. Colon
Only one choice remained: he must confront his enemy.
7. Dash
Writing well may be hard—but it's worth the effort.
8. Parentheses
The first moon landing captivated America (the TV ratings were the highest ever).

Introductory Elements: Four Cases to Be Set Off by a Comma

1. Connecting adverb or adverb phrase (with some exceptions)
Conversely, binge drinkers tend to underestimate the risks of excessive drinking.
2. Commenting adverb or adverb phrase
To be sure, some researchers offer conclusions that contradict this claim.
3. Long introductory phrase or clause
Despite the many concerns about the safety of nuclear power plants and their waste disposal, it seems inevitable that the United States will increase its nuclear footprint.
4. Introductory element that might confuse readers

When the speaker concludes, her presentation will be all that most of the audience knows about her.

Trailing Elements: Three Ways to Set Them Off

1. Use a comma to separate a trailer from a long main clause
Missile defense systems, which have an overwhelming number of variables that must be managed, make more sense in the abstract than the reality, because in the long run an engineering project can only be as successful as our understanding of the problem it is trying to solve.
2. Use a comma to separate one trailer from a previous one
Customers will respond when a new advertising campaign reframes the terms in which customers think about a product, because they cannot be put out of the running for “share of mind.”
3. Use a comma or a dash to create an emphasizing pause
There are, however, several situations in which you may set off a trailing element—if, that is, you think it might help your readers.

Elements Internal to Clauses

Adjective Strings

1. Use commas to separate adjectives when they independently modify the noun
They strolled out into the warm, luminous night.
2. Do not use commas when the one adjective affects the meaning of the next
She refused to be identified with a traditional political label.

Interrupting Elements

1. Enclose an interrupting element in paired commas, parentheses, or dashes
Alex Rodriguez is (according to reports) as tainted by steroids as Barry Bonds.

Explanatory Elements

1. Set off most explanatory elements with paired commas
These five books, all required reading, are on reserve at the library.
2. Use dashes for a conversational tone or if the element has internal punctuation.
The influence of three impressionists—Monet (1840–1926), Sisley (1839–1899), and Degas (1834–1917) is obvious in her work.
3. Use parentheses to make it seem an aside or a footnote
Kierkegaard (a Danish philosopher) once asked, “What is anxiety?”

Series and Lists

Two Coordinated Elements

1. Never use a comma to separate two coordinated words
we ate but didn't drink
2. Use a comma to separate coordinated phrases or clauses only if readers might be confused about where one ends and the next begins
It is in the graveyard that Hamlet finally realizes that the inevitable end of life is the grave and decay, and that pride and all plotting and counter-plotting must lead to dust.

Series of Three or More

1. Use commas after each item and a conjunction before the last
You must go home, get your homework started, and stay off the Internet.
2. Use semicolons instead of commas for long and complex items
It was the project engineers who failed to consult the risk-management team, even though they worked in the same building; who designed the apparatus (though without user-testing or even without thinking about the needs of users); and who now have cost the company its good reputation with farmers.

Run-in Lists

1. Put a colon or (to be informal or stylish) a dash before the list
People expect three things of government: peace, prosperity, and respect for civil rights.
2. Punctuate the list as a series; do not capitalize the first word
including pens, pencils, paper clips, tape, and the like
3. Never end the introducing clause with a verb
NOT: The qualifications are: a doctorate in economics, industry experience, people skills, and an ability to communicate statistical data to a lay audience.
BUT: The qualifications are as follows: a doctorate in economics...

Vertical Lists

1. Put a colon or period (but not a dash) at the end of a complete introductory clause; use no punctuation after an introductory subject or subject-verb
To be as clear as possible, your sentences must do the following:
 - Match characters to subjects and actions to verbs.
 - Begin with old information.
 - Use words that readers can picture.To be as clear as possible, your sentences must
 - match characters to subjects and actions to verbs;
 - begin with old information;
 - use words that readers can picture.
2. If the items are complete sentences, capitalize the first word and use terminal punctuation at the end
The report offered three conclusions.
 1. The securities market will not soon recover.
 2. The securities industry is largely to blame.
 3. The economy will not recover until securities are better regulated.
 4. If the items are not complete sentences, omit terminal punctuation, even for the last item, and do not capitalize the first word

Quotations

1. Reproduce all quoted words exactly; indicate omitted words with an ellipsis; indicate added or changed words with square brackets
Original: Posner focuses on religion not for its spirituality, but for its social functions: "A notable feature of American society is religious pluralism, and we should consider how this relates to the efficacy of governance by social norms" (299).
Changed version: In his discussion of religion, Posner says of American society that "a notable feature... is [its] religious pluralism" (299).

2. Change the first letter of a quotation so that complete sentences start with a capital and incomplete sentences begin with a lowercase letter

Original: As a result of these earlier developments, the Mexican people were bound to benefit from the change.”

Changed version: Fernandez claims, “The Mexican people were bound to benefit from the change.”

3. For the introduction to a quotation, follow complete sentences with periods, question marks, or colons; phrases with commas; *that* with no punctuation

Posner focuses on religion for its social functions. “A notable feature...”

Posner says, “A notable feature...”

Posner says that “a notable feature...”

4. Run-in: Enclose all quoted words in pairs of quotation marks. Place the final quotation mark

- outside periods and commas

...now is the time.”

- inside colons and semicolons

...now is the time”; but we also...

- outside question marks and parentheses that are part of the quotation

He asked, “Is now the time?”

- inside question marks and parentheses that are part of your sentence

Will he say, “Now is the time”?

- inside a parenthetical reference

...now is the time” (Walker 210).

5. Block: Do not enclose the quotation in quotation marks; place a parenthetical reference after the final punctuation

According to Jared Diamond,

Because technology begets more technology,... [t]echnology’s history exemplifies what is termed an autocatalytic process: that is, one that speeds up at a rate that increases with time, because the process catalyzes itself. (301)

See more about Turabian style at www.turabian.org.