

# Punctuation

Punctuation affects meaning, not just appearance. Writing with minimal or insufficient punctuation is the mark of a writer lacking in confidence.

**Hacker –Punctuation and  
Mechanics  
(Sections 17-24)**

**Strunk and White  
(Section I)**

**A woman without her man is nothing**

**A woman, without her man, is  
nothing.**

**A woman: without her, man is  
nothing.**

The Runaway #1 British Bestseller

# Eats, Shoots & Leaves



The Zero Tolerance  
Approach to Punctuation

**LYNNE TRUSS**

With a Foreword by Frank McCourt,  
author of *Angela's Ashes*

**Dear Jack**

**I want a man who knows what love is all about you are generous kind thoughtful people who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior you have ruined me for other men I yearn for you I have no feelings whatsoever when we are apart I can be forever happy will you let me be yours**

**Jane**

**Dear Jack,**

**I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we are apart. I can be forever happy – will you let me be yours?**

**Jane**

**Dear Jack,**

**I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men I yearn! For you I have no feelings whatsoever. When we are apart I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?**

**Yours,**

**Jane**

# Period (.) = breath

End a sentence:

Jack did the experiment.

# Period

End an abbreviation:

Ms. S. Johnson is our new director.

S. Johnson, M.S., is our new director.



# Period

Show the end of the  $10^{\text{th}}$  place in numbers:

We added 12.6 g of atropine to the solution.

# Use with other punctuation

Have you seen Phil S.?

I have seen Phil S.

# Comma (,) = half breath

Separate items in a list:

You will need beakers lids and tweezers.

You will need beakers, lids, and tweezers.

The “Oxford” or “serial” comma.

Some use the rule of >2 in a list justifies a comma.

***replace an “and”***

# Comma

Parenthetical expressions:

Evolution, to our knowledge, does not operate in this way.

# Comma

Appositives:

My brother Fred was on his way to school.

Fred, my other brother, was on his way to school.

My other brother, Fred, was on his way to school.

# Comma

Contrasted elements:

Sodium, unlike calcium, is unstable in this combination.

# Comma

Set off direct quotations:

He said, "I did the experiment."

# Comma

**Set off non-restrictive dependent clauses  
(“which” clauses, for instance):**

For fieldwork you need hiking boots, which are expensive.

**Compare with restrictive clauses  
(“that” classes, for instance)**

For fieldwork you need hiking boots that are expensive.



# Comma

## Dates and addresses

31 July 2005

June 12, 2005

Tuesday, February 4, 2005

Michael Dillon, Department of Zoology and  
Physiology, University of Wyoming,  
Laramie, WY 82071 USA

# Comma

**To mark order-of-magnitude points in numbers:**

13,835

**To mark the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> place (European continent):**

12,65

# Misuses of commas

**In restrictive clauses:**

The dog, that used to live next door, now lives down the street.

# Misuses of commas

**To separate a subject from its predicate:**

Zoos large enough to give animals freedom to roam, are becoming more popular.

# Misuses of commas

**At the beginning of lists:**

Other causes of asthmatic attacks are, stress, change in weather, pollution, and plant allergens.

# Misuses of commas

**At the beginning of lists:**

Other causes of asthmatic attacks are, stress, change in weather, pollution, and plant allergens.

# Semicolon

**“ ... a semicolon is between two related sentences where there is no conjunction such as 'and' or 'but', and where a comma would be ungrammatical ...”**

**“... linking words such as 'however', 'nevertheless', 'also', 'consequently', and 'hence' require a semicolon ...”**

***Lynn Truss***

# Semicolon

**Between independent clauses:**

The early bird gets the worm; the early worm gets eaten.

The early bird gets the worm.

The early worm gets eaten.



# Semicolon

**Between independent clauses where the relationship between clauses is obvious:**

His offer sounded too good to be true; I did not believe it.

***instead of***

His offer sounded too good to be true, so I did not believe it.

# Semicolon

**Not correct where the relationship between clauses is not obvious:**

~~She wanted to stay until the end of the talk;  
she had to leave.~~

She wanted to stay until the end of the talk, but she had to leave.

# Semicolon

**Not obvious:**

The task would be difficult; I would have a day to do it.



# Semicolon

**Between elements containing internal punctuation:**

To assemble the structure, you will need a hammer and a drill; size A, B and D nails; quarter-inch, three-eighths-inch and half-inch drill bits; and a level.

# Semicolon

**Between items in a list containing  
internal punctuation:**

(Johnson, 1987; Smith, 1988)

(Johnson 1987, Smith 1988)

(Laramie, Wyoming; Fort Collins, Colorado)

# Semicolon

**To set off conjunction-like words:**

She thought she was early; in fact, she was the first to arrive.

**but not**

It was my best performance ever, in fact.

# Colon

***“ ... delivers the goods that have been invoiced in the preceding words ... ”***

– H.W. Fowler

***“So colons introduce the part of a sentence that exemplifies, restates, elaborates, undermines, explains, or balances the preceding part.”***

– Lynne Truss

# Colon

**Calls attention to the words following:**

We brought in the needed supplies: food, traps, and camping gear.



# Misuses of the colon

**Lists introduced by:**

**such as**

**including**

**for example**

We brought in the needed supplies,  
including: food, traps, and camping gear.



# Colon

**To indicate a relative measurement or ratio:**

The ratio of infected to uninfected animals was 1:4.

The population sex structure was 36 bulls:100 cows.

# Colon

**To separate a title from a subtitle:**

Martens, sables, and fishers: biology and conservation

# Quotation marks

## Direct attribution:

Jane said, "Come with me."

# Single quotation marks

**Direct attribution within a direct attribution:**

Jane said, "Jack told me, 'Come with me.'"

# Misuse of single quotation marks

**As double quotation marks:**

~~This 'customary' use is not within the acceptable range.~~

# Quotation marks

## Words as words:

"Affect" and "effect" are homonyms and are often confused.

("Affect" is usually a verb (*can also be a noun or adjective*) and "effect" is usually a noun)

# Quotation marks

## Coined or unusual words:

There are now software programs available that allow you to determine the "Fog Index" of your writing.



# Quotation marks

**Coined or unusual words:**

Check any utilities using "blocking ineligible" warnings.

***rather than***

Check any utilities using blocking ineligible warnings.

# Quotation marks

**To disown a trite expression or phrase:**

The "early bird" was there, looking for worms.

***BUT***

Hacker would say this is a misuse (20e)

# Quotation marks

**Sarcasm:**

The "family values" crowd was there, trying to manipulate and control the meeting.



# Parentheses

**To set off material that interrupts the flow of a sentence:**

**Example of word or two**

After considerable pleading, she finally got him to reveal the secret ingredient (sodium chloride).

# Parentheses

**To set off material that interrupts the flow of a sentence:**

**Complete sentence (clause)**

The race for second place (first place, of course, was a foregone conclusion) was still wide open.

# Parentheses

**To set off material that interrupts the flow of a sentence:**

**Numbers, dates, statistics**

Marie Curie (1867-1934) was the first person to be awarded a second Nobel prize.

# Parentheses

**To set off material that interrupts the flow of a sentence:**

**Numbers, dates, statistics**

Treated mice ( $\bar{x} = 4.3$  g) experienced larger weight gains ( $t = 6.7$ ,  $df = 47$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) than untreated ones ( $\bar{x} = 2.6$  g).

# Brackets

**To set off material in parentheses:**

**In this case, internal set-off.**

The effect of parasites on reproduction  
(reviewed by Johnson [1988]) is variable,  
depending on species.



# Brackets

**To indicate editorial notes or marks:**

Miller's (1892) denouncement of survival of the fittest [sic] showed his bias toward Larmarckism.

# Brackets

**To indicate editorial notes or marks:**

When I received news of the death of Charlotte [the author's niece], I changed plans and drove to Denver immediately.

# **Apostrophe (')**

**Incorrect uses (too many to list):**

**Possessive pronouns: their's**



# Apostrophe (')

**Correct uses:**

**1. Possessive of a singular noun:**

the boy's hat

# Apostrophe (')

**Correct uses:**

**2. Possessive of a plural noun that does not end with an "s":**

the children's playground

# Apostrophe (')

**Correct uses:**

**3. Possessive of a regular plural noun that ends with an "s":**

the boys' hats

# Apostrophe (')

**Correct uses:**

**4. Time or quantity:**

one month's time

# Apostrophe (')

**Correct uses:**

**5. Omission of figures in dates (informal):**

I was born in '85



# Apostrophe (')

**Correct uses:**

**6. Omission of letters (informal):**

She'd've had the cat-o'-nine-tails, I s'pose, if we hadn't stopped 'em.

# Apostrophe (')

**Correct uses:**

**7. The plurals of letters:**

How many n's are there in melatonin?

# Apostrophe (')

**Correct uses:**

**8. The plurals of words:**

too many if's, and's and but's

# **A note on the use of the possessive**

**Limit the possessive to people, animals,  
and quantities – avoid possessives of  
objects.**

In formal writing:

the student's parents

the committee's secretary

the assailant's identity

the dog's tail

the *Paramecium's* mitochondria

the tree's root

the car's engine

the bridge's abutment

honesty's purpose

accuracy's reward

**better**

**worse**



# **Slash (front slash, virgule)**

**As a casual shorthand for "and":**

**The one room in his tiny apartment  
serves as a bedroom/workshop.**



**(Very little use in formal writing)**

# Slash (front slash, virgule)

To indicate a ratio:

6 g/cm

6 g per cm

6 g cm<sup>-1</sup>

# Slash (front slash, virgule)

**As part of "and/or":**

Chocolate and/or salsa will accompany the dish.

**Means at least one of chocolate and salsa is included, and that both of them might be, which is exactly what "chocolate or salsa" also means. In contrast, the exclusive or, "chocolate or salsa, but not both," must be specified explicitly.**



# **Ellipsis**

**(a string of 3 dots)**

**To indicate missing text or narrative:**

As Darwin (1859:396) wrote, "There is a grandeur in this view of life, . . . having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one. . . .".

# Ellipsis

**To indicate hesitation or trailing off of speech:**

I would much prefer if you . . . would not pursue this matter further.

I am not sure what he meant, but . . .

**Not used much in formal writing.**

# Hyphens and dashes

Hyphen -

En dash –

Em dash —

Two-em dash——

Three-em dash———

# Hyphen -

## End-of-line word breaks:

**By the time he had returned, the misunderstanding had expanded into an argument.**

# Hyphen

**To construct compound adjectives:**

I would not touch that with a ten-foot pole.

. . . a 5.6-mg increase over three days.

The monkeys, which weighed an average of 1800 g, underwent a 45-g decrease in weight.

# Hyphen

**To construct compound adjectives:**

A cross-section of the public.

vs.

A cross section of the public.

# Hyphen

**As a stand-in for a repeated word:**

These methods variously over- and underestimate blood sugar levels.

# Em dash

## Marking off a digression:

The council members—with the conspicuous absence of the president—met to discuss the missing funds.

**Typing dashes in WORD requires continuous character input. It may require retyping.**