P

Punctuation

P1 The comma, 235
a. Independent clauses with coordinating conjunction, 235
b. Introductory elements, 236
c. Items in a series, 237
d. Coordinate adjectives, 238
e. Nonrestrictive elements, 239
f. Transitions, parenthetical expressions, absolute phrases, contrasts, 242
g. Nouns of direct address, *yes* and *no*, interrogative tags, interjections, 243
h. *he said*, etc., 244
i. Dates, addresses, titles, numbers, 244
j. To prevent confusion, 245

P2 Unnecessary commas, 246
a. Compound elements, 246
b. Between verb and subject or object, 246
c. Before or after a series, 247
d. Cumulative adjectives, 247
e. Restrictive elements, 248
f. Concluding adverb clauses, 248
g. Other misuses, 249

P3 The semicolon, 250
a. Independent clauses with no coordinating conjunction, 251
b. Independent clauses with transitional expression, 251
c. Series with internal punctuation, 252
d. Misuses, 253

P4 The colon, 254
a. Before a list, an appositive, or a quotation, 254
b. Between independent clauses, 255
c. Conventional uses, 255
d. Misuses, 255

P5 The apostrophe, 256
a. Possessive nouns, 256
b. Possessive indefinite pronouns, 258
c. Contractions, 258
d. Plurals of numbers, letters, etc., 258
e. Misuses, 259

P6 Quotation marks, 260
a. Direct quotations, 260
b. Long quotations, 261
c. Quotations within quotations, 262
d. Titles, 262
e. Words as words, 262
f. With other punctuation, 262
g. Misuses, 265

P7 Other marks, 266
a. Period, 266
b. Question mark, 267
c. Exclamation point, 267
d. Dash, 268
e. Parentheses, 269
f. Brackets, 270
g. Ellipsis mark, 270
h. Slash, 271

P1

The comma

The comma was invented to help readers. Without it, sentence parts can collide into one another unexpectedly, causing misreadings.

CONFUSING If you cook Elmer will do the dishes.

CONFUSING While we were eating a rattlesnake approached our campsite.

Add commas in the logical places (after *cook* and *eating*), and suddenly all is clear. No longer is Elmer being cooked, the rattlesnake being eaten.

Various rules have evolved to prevent such misreadings and to speed readers along through complex grammatical structures. Those rules are detailed in this section.

GRAMMAR CHECKERS have mixed success in flagging missing or misused commas. They can tell you that a comma is usually used before *which* but not before *that* (see P1-e), and they can flag some missing commas after an introductory word or word group or between items in a series. In general, however, the programs are unreliable. For example, in an essay with ten missing commas and five misused ones, a grammar checker spotted only one missing comma (after the word *therefore*).

P1-a Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining independent clauses.

When a coordinating conjunction connects two or more independent clauses—word groups that could stand alone as separate sentences—a comma must precede it. There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English: *and, but, or, nor, for, so,* and *yet.*

A comma tells readers that one independent clause has come to a close and that another is about to begin.

► **Nearly everyone has heard of love at first sight, but I fell in love at first dance.**

EXCEPTION: If the two independent clauses are short and there is no danger of misreading, the comma may be omitted.

The plane took off and we were on our way.

CAUTION: As a rule, do *not* use a comma to separate compound elements that are not independent clauses. (See P2-a.)

► **A good money manager controls expenses/and invests surplus dollars to meet future needs.**

The word group following *and* is not an independent clause; it is the second half of a compound predicate.

P1-b Use a comma after an introductory word group.

The most common introductory word groups are clauses and phrases functioning as adverbs. Such word groups usually tell when, where, how, why, or under what conditions the main action of the sentence occurred. (See B3-a, B3-b, and B3-e.)

A comma tells readers that the introductory clause or phrase has come to a close and that the main part of the sentence is about to begin.

► **When Irwin was ready to eat, his cat jumped onto the table and started to purr.**

► **Near a small stream at the bottom of the canyon, we discovered an abandoned shelter.**

EXCEPTION: The comma may be omitted after a short adverb clause or phrase if there is no danger of misreading.

In no time we were at 2,800 feet.

Sentences also frequently begin with participial phrases describing the noun or pronoun immediately following them. The comma tells readers that they are about to learn the identity of the person or thing described; therefore, the comma is usually required even when the phrase is short. (See also B3-b.)

► **Thinking his motorcade drive through Dallas was routine, President Kennedy smiled and waved at the crowds.**

► **Buried under layers of younger rocks, the earth's oldest rocks contain no fossils.**

NOTE: Other introductory word groups include conjunctive adverbs, transitional expressions, and absolute phrases. (See P1-f.)

P1-c Use a comma between all items in a series.

Unless you are writing for a publication that follows another convention, separate all items in a series—including the last two—with commas.

► **Bubbles of air, leaves, ferns, bits of wood, and insects are often found trapped in amber.**

Although some publications omit the comma between the last two items, be aware that its omission can result in ambiguity or misreading.

► **My uncle willed me all of his property, houses, and warehouses.**

Did the uncle will his property *and* houses *and* warehouses—or simply his property, consisting of houses and warehouses? If the first meaning is intended, a comma is necessary to prevent ambiguity.

► **The activities include a search for lost treasure, dubious financial dealings, much discussion of ancient heresies, and midnight orgies.**

Without the comma, the people seem to be discussing orgies, not participating in them. The comma makes it clear that *midnight orgies* is a separate item in the series.

ON THE WEB

The rules on using commas with items in a series have sparked debates. If you're interested in learning why, go to **www.dianahacker.com/writersref**

and click on ▶ **Language Debates**
▶ **Commas with items in a series**

P1-d Use a comma between coordinate adjectives not joined by *and*. Do not use a comma between cumulative adjectives.

When two or more adjectives each modify a noun separately, they are *coordinate*.

Roberto is a *warm, gentle, affectionate* father.

Adjectives are coordinate if they can be joined with *and* (warm *and* gentle *and* affectionate).

Two or more adjectives that do not modify the noun separately are cumulative.

Three large gray shapes moved slowly toward us.

Beginning with the adjective closest to the noun *shapes,* these modifiers lean on one another, piggyback style, with each modifying a larger word group. *Gray* modifies *shapes, large* modifies *gray shapes,* and *three* modifies *large gray shapes.* We cannot insert the word *and* between cumulative adjectives (three *and* large *and* gray shapes).

COORDINATE ADJECTIVES

▶ Patients with severe, irreversible brain damage should not be put on life support systems.

CUMULATIVE ADJECTIVES

▶ Ira ordered a rich/chocolate/layer cake for his mother's birthday dinner.

P1-e Use commas to set off nonrestrictive elements. Do not use commas to set off restrictive elements.

Word groups describing nouns or pronouns (adjective clauses, adjective phrases, and appositives) can be restrictive or nonrestrictive. A *restrictive* element defines or limits the meaning of the word it modifies and is therefore essential to the meaning of the sentence. Because it contains essential information, a restrictive element is not set off with commas.

RESTRICTIVE

For camp the children needed clothes *that were washable.*

If you remove a restrictive element from a sentence, the meaning changes significantly, becoming more general than you intended. The writer of the example sentence does not mean that the children needed clothes in general. The intended meaning is more limited: The children needed *washable* clothes.

A *nonrestrictive* element describes a noun or pronoun whose meaning has already been clearly defined or limited. Because it contains nonessential or parenthetical information, a nonrestrictive element is set off with commas.

NONRESTRICTIVE

For camp the children needed sturdy shoes, *which were expensive.*

If you remove a nonrestrictive element from a sentence, the meaning does not change dramatically. Some meaning is lost, to be sure, but the defining characteristics of the person or thing described remain the same as before. The children needed *sturdy shoes,* and these happened to be expensive.

NOTE: Often it is difficult to tell whether a word group is restrictive or nonrestrictive without seeing it in context and considering the writer's meaning. Both of the following sentences are grammatically correct, but their meanings are slightly different.

The dessert made with fresh raspberries was delicious.

The dessert, made with fresh raspberries, was delicious.

In the example without commas, the phrase *made with fresh raspberries* tells readers which of two or more desserts the writer is referring to. In the example with commas, the phrase merely adds information about the particular dessert served with the meal.

Adjective clauses

Adjective clauses are patterned like sentences, containing subjects and verbs, but they function within sentences as modifiers of nouns or pronouns. Adjective clauses begin with a relative pronoun (*who, whom, whose, which, that*) or with a relative adverb (*where, when*).

Nonrestrictive adjective clauses are set off with commas; restrictive adjective clauses are not.

NONRESTRICTIVE CLAUSE

▶ Ed's country house, which is located on thirteen acres, was completely furnished with bats in the rafters and mice in the kitchen.

The clause *which is located on thirteen acres* does not restrict the meaning of *Ed's country house,* so the information is nonessential.

RESTRICTIVE CLAUSE

▶ An office manager for a corporation that had government contracts asked her supervisor for permission to reprimand her co-workers for smoking.

Because the adjective clause *that had government contracts* identifies the corporation, the information is essential.

NOTE: Use *that* only with restrictive clauses. Many writers prefer to use *which* only with nonrestrictive clauses, but usage varies.

ON THE WEB

The rules on using *that* versus *which* have sparked debates. If you're interested in learning why, go to
www.dianahacker.com/writersref
and click on ▶ **Language Debates**
▶ ***that* versus *which***

Phrases functioning as adjectives

Prepositional or verbal phrases functioning as adjectives may be restrictive or nonrestrictive. Nonrestrictive phrases are set off with commas; restrictive phrases are not.

NONRESTRICTIVE PHRASE

▶ The helicopter, with its 100,000-candlepower spotlight illuminating the area, circled above.

The *with* phrase is nonessential because its purpose is not to specify which of two or more helicopters is being discussed.

RESTRICTIVE PHRASE

▶ One corner of the attic was filled with newspapers dating from the 1920s.

Dating from the 1920s restricts the meaning of *newspapers,* so the comma should be omitted.

Appositives

An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun. Nonrestrictive appositives are set off with commas; restrictive appositives are not.

NONRESTRICTIVE APPOSITIVE

▶ Darwin's most important book, *On the Origin of Species,* was the result of many years of research.

The term *most important* restricts the meaning to one book, so the appositive *On the Origin of Species* is nonrestrictive.

RESTRICTIVE APPOSITIVE

▶ The song "Fire It Up" was blasted out of amplifiers ten feet tall.

Once they've read *song,* readers still don't know precisely which song the writer means. The appositive following *song* restricts its meaning.

P1-f Use commas to set off transitional and parenthetical expressions, absolute phrases, and contrasted elements.

Transitional expressions

Transitional expressions serve as bridges between sentences or parts of sentences. They include conjunctive adverbs such as *however, therefore,* and *moreover* and transitional phrases such as *for example, as a matter of fact,* and *in other words.* (For a more complete list, see P3-b.)

When a transitional expression appears between independent clauses in a compound sentence, it is preceded by a semicolon and is usually followed by a comma.

- Minh did not understand our language; moreover, he was unfamiliar with our customs.

When a transitional expression appears at the beginning of a sentence or in the middle of an independent clause, it is usually set off with commas.

- As a matter of fact, American football was established by fans who wanted to play a more organized game of rugby.
- Natural foods are not always salt free; celery, for example, contains more sodium than most people would imagine.

EXCEPTION: If a transitional expression blends smoothly with the rest of the sentence, calling for little or no pause in reading, it does not need to be set off with commas. Expressions such as *also, at least, certainly, consequently, indeed, of course, no doubt, perhaps, then,* and *therefore* do not always call for a pause.

Bill's bicycle is broken; *therefore* you will need to borrow Sue's.

Bill's bicycle is broken; you will *therefore* need to borrow Sue's.

Parenthetical expressions

Expressions that are distinctly parenthetical should be set off with commas. Providing supplemental comments or information, they interrupt the flow of a sentence or appear as afterthoughts.

- Evolution, so far as we know, doesn't work this way.
- The bluefish weighed twelve pounds, give or take a few ounces.

Absolute phrases

Absolute phrases should be set off with commas. An absolute phrase, which modifies the whole sentence, usually consists of a noun followed by a participle or participial phrase. It may appear at the beginning or at the end of a sentence. (See B3-d.)

- Our grant having been approved, we were at last able to begin the archaeological dig.
- Elvis Presley made music industry history in the 1950s, his records having sold more than ten million copies.

CAUTION: Do not insert a comma between the noun and participle of an absolute construction.

- The next day/ being a school day, we turned down the invitation.

Contrasted elements

Sharp contrasts beginning with words such as *not* and *unlike* are set off with commas.

- The Epicurean philosophers sought mental, not bodily, pleasures.
- Unlike Robert, Celia loved dance contests.

P1-g Use commas to set off nouns of direct address, the words *yes* and *no,* interrogative tags, and mild interjections.

- Forgive us, Dr. Spock, for spanking Brian.
- Yes, the loan will probably be approved.

► The film was faithful to the book, wasn't it?

► Well, cases like these are difficult to decide.

P1-h Use commas with expressions such as *he said* to set off direct quotations. (See also P6-f.)

► Naturalist Arthur Cleveland Bent once remarked, "In part the peregrine declined unnoticed because it is not adorable."

► "Convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than lies," wrote philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

P1-i Use commas with dates, addresses, titles, and numbers.

Dates

In dates, the year is set off from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas.

► On December 12, 1890, orders were sent out for the arrest of Sitting Bull.

EXCEPTIONS: Commas are not needed if the date is inverted or if only the month and year are given.

Our downtown office's recycling plan went into effect on 15 April 2002.

January 2001 was an extremely cold month.

Addresses

The elements of an address or place name are followed by commas. A zip code, however, is not preceded by a comma.

► John Lennon was born in Liverpool, England, in 1940.

► Please send the package to Greg Tarvin at 708 Spring Street, Washington, Illinois 61571.

Titles

If a title follows a name, separate it from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas.

► Sandra Barnes, M.D., performed the surgery.

Numbers

In numbers more than four digits long, use commas to separate the numbers into groups of three, starting from the right. In numbers four digits long, a comma is optional.

3,500 [*or* 3500]
100,000
5,000,000

EXCEPTIONS: Do not use commas in street numbers, zip codes, telephone numbers, or years.

P1-j Use a comma to prevent confusion.

In certain contexts, a comma is necessary to prevent confusion. If the writer has omitted a word or phrase, for example, a comma may be needed to signal the omission.

► To err is human; to forgive, divine.

If two words in a row echo each other, a comma may be needed for ease of reading.

► All of the catastrophes that we had feared might happen, happened.

Sometimes a comma is needed to prevent readers from grouping words in ways that do not match the writer's intention.

► Patients who can, walk up and down the halls several times a day.

ON THE WEB

For electronic exercises on using commas, go to
www.dianahacker.com/writersref
and click on ▶ **Electronic Grammar Exercises**
▶ **Punctuation**
▶ **E-ex P1–1 through P1–3**

P2

Unnecessary commas

P2-a Do not use a comma between compound elements that are not independent clauses.

Although a comma is used before a coordinating conjunction joining independent clauses (see P1-a), this rule should not be extended to other compound word groups.

▶ Marie Curie discovered radium/and later applied her work on radioactivity to medicine.

And links two verbs in a compound predicate: *discovered* and *applied.*

▶ Jake still does not realize that his illness is serious/ and that he will have to alter his diet to improve.

And connects two subordinate clauses, each beginning with *that.*

P2-b Do not use a comma to separate a verb from its subject or object.

A sentence should flow from subject to verb to object without unnecessary pauses. Commas may appear between these major sentence elements only when a specific rule calls for them.

▶ Zoos large enough to give the animals freedom to roam/ are becoming more popular.

▶ Francesca explained to Mike/ that she was expecting an important call from her brother in Milan.

The subject *Zoos* should not be separated from its verb, *are becoming.* In the second sentence, the comma should not separate the verb, *explained,* from its object, the subordinate clause *that she was expecting an important call.*

P2-c Do not use a comma before the first or after the last item in a series.

Though commas are required between items in a series (see P1-c), do not place them either before or after the series.

▶ Other causes of asthmatic attacks are/ stress, change in temperature, humidity, and cold air.

▶ Ironically, this job that appears so glamorous, carefree, and easy/ carries a high degree of responsibility.

P2-d Do not use a comma between cumulative adjectives, between an adjective and a noun, or between an adverb and an adjective.

Though commas are required between coordinate adjectives (those that can be joined with *and*), they do not belong between cumulative adjectives (those that cannot be joined with *and*). (For a full discussion, see P1-d.)

▶ In the corner of the closet we found an old/ maroon hatbox from Sears.

A comma should never be used to separate an adjective from the noun that follows it.

▶ It was a senseless, dangerous/ mission.

Nor should a comma be used to separate an adverb from an adjective that follows it.

► The Hurst Home is unsuitable as a mental facility for severely/ disturbed youths.

P2-e Do not use commas to set off restrictive or mildly parenthetical elements.

Restrictive elements are modifiers or appositives necessary for identifying the nouns they follow; therefore, they are essential to the meaning of the sentence and should not be set off with commas. (For a full discussion, see P1-e.)

► Drivers/ who think they own the road/ make cycling a dangerous sport.

The *who* clause restricts the meaning of *Drivers* and is therefore essential to the meaning of the sentence. Putting commas around the *who* clause falsely suggests that all drivers think they own the road.

► Margaret Mead's book/ *Coming of Age in Samoa*/ stirred up considerable controversy when it was first published.

Since Margaret Mead wrote more than one book, the appositive contains information essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Although commas should be used with distinctly parenthetical expressions (see P1-f), do not use them to set off elements that are only mildly parenthetical.

► Charisse believes that the Internet is/ essentially/ a bastion of advertising.

P2-f Do not use a comma to set off a concluding adverb clause that is essential to the meaning of the sentence.

When adverb clauses introduce a sentence, they are nearly always followed by a comma (see P1-b). When they conclude a sentence, however, they are not set off by commas if their content is essential to the meaning of the earlier part of the sentence. Adverb clauses beginning with *after, as soon as, before, because, if, since, unless, until,* and *when* are usually essential.

► Don't visit Paris at the height of the tourist season/ unless you have booked hotel reservations.

Without the concluding *unless* clause, the meaning of the sentence would be broader than the writer intended.

When a concluding adverb clause is nonessential, it should be preceded by a comma. Clauses beginning with *although, even though, though,* and *whereas* are usually nonessential.

► The lecture seemed to last only a short time, although the clock said it had gone on for more than an hour.

P2-g Avoid other common misuses of the comma.

Do not use a comma in the following situations.

AFTER A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION (*AND, BUT, OR, NOR, FOR, SO, YET*)

► Most soap operas are performed live, but/ some are taped.

AFTER *SUCH AS* OR *LIKE*

► Many shade-loving plants, such as/ begonias, impatiens, and coleus, can add color to a shady garden.

BEFORE *THAN*

► Touring Crete was more thrilling for us/ than visiting the Greek islands frequented by rich Europeans.

AFTER *ALTHOUGH*

► Although/ the air was balmy, the water was too cold for swimming.

BEFORE A PARENTHESIS

▶ At MCI Sylvia began at the bottom/ (with only three and a half walls and a swivel chair), but within five years she had been promoted to supervisor.

TO SET OFF AN INDIRECT (REPORTED) QUOTATION

▶ Samuel Goldwyn once said/ that a verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's written on.

WITH A QUESTION MARK OR AN EXCLAMATION POINT

▶ "Why don't you try it?/" she coaxed.

ON THE WEB

For an electronic exercise on the use and misuse of commas, go to **www.dianahacker.com/writersref**

and click on ▶ **Electronic Grammar Exercises**
▶ **Punctuation**
▶ **E-ex P2–1**

P3

The semicolon

The semicolon is used to separate major sentence elements of equal grammatical rank.

GRAMMAR CHECKERS flag some, but not all, misused semicolons (P3-d). In addition, they can alert you to some run-on sentences (G6). However, they miss more run-on sentences than they identify, and they sometimes flag correct sentences as possible run-ons. (See also the grammar checker advice in G6.)

P3-a Use a semicolon between closely related independent clauses not joined with a coordinating conjunction.

When related independent clauses appear in one sentence, they are ordinarily connected with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*). The conjunction expresses the relation between the clauses. If the relation is clear without the conjunction, a writer may choose to connect the clauses with a semicolon instead.

> Injustice is relatively easy to bear; what stings is justice.
> —H. L. Mencken

A semicolon must be used whenever a coordinating conjunction has been omitted between independent clauses. To use merely a comma creates a kind of run-on sentence known as a comma splice. (See G6.)

▶ In 1800, a traveler needed six weeks to get from New York City to Chicago/; in 1860, the trip by railroad took two days.

CAUTION: Do not overuse the semicolon as a means of revising comma splices. For other revision strategies, see G6.

P3-b Use a semicolon between independent clauses linked with a transitional expression.

Transitional expressions include conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases.

CONJUNCTIVE ADVERBS

accordingly	finally	likewise	similarly
also	furthermore	meanwhile	specifically
anyway	hence	moreover	still
besides	however	nevertheless	subsequently
certainly	incidentally	next	then
consequently	indeed	nonetheless	therefore
conversely	instead	otherwise	thus

P7

Other marks

GRAMMAR CHECKERS are of little help with end punctuation and the other marks discussed in this section. Most notably, they neglect to tell you when your sentence is missing end punctuation.

P7-a The period

Use a period to end all sentences except direct questions or genuine exclamations. Also use periods in abbreviations according to convention.

To end sentences

Everyone knows that a period should be used to end most sentences. The only problems that arise concern the choice between a period and a question mark or between a period and an exclamation point.

If a sentence reports a question instead of asking it directly, it should end with a period, not a question mark.

► Celia asked whether the picnic would be canceled?.

If a sentence is not a genuine exclamation, it should end with a period, not an exclamation point.

► After years of working her way through school, Pat finally graduated with high honors!.

In abbreviations

A period is conventionally used in abbreviations such as these:

Mr.	B.A.	B.C.	i.e.	A.M. (or a.m.)
Mrs.	M.A.	B.C.E.	e.g.	P.M. (or p.m.)
Ms.	Ph.D.	A.D.	etc.	
Dr.	R.N.	C.E.		

A period is not used in U.S. Postal Service abbreviations for states: MD, TX, CA.

Ordinarily a period is not used in abbreviations of organization names:

NATO	UNESCO	UCLA	PUSH	IBM
TVA	IRS	AFL-CIO	NVBA	FTC
USA (*or* U.S.A.)	NAACP	SEC	FCC	NIH

Usage varies, however. When in doubt, consult a dictionary, a style manual, or a publication by the agency in question. Even the yellow pages can help.

NOTE: If a sentence ends with a period marking an abbreviation, do not add a second period.

P7-b The question mark

Obviously a direct question should be followed by a question mark.

What is the horsepower of a 747 engine?

If a polite request is written in the form of a question, it may be followed by a period.

Would you please send me your catalog of lilies.

CAUTION: Do not use a question mark after an indirect question (one that is reported rather than asked directly). Use a period instead.

► He asked me who was teaching the mythology course?.

NOTE: Questions in a series may be followed by question marks even when they are not complete sentences.

We wondered where Calamity had hidden this time. Under the sink? Behind the furnace? On top of the bookcase?

P7-c The exclamation point

Use an exclamation point after a word group or sentence that expresses exceptional feeling or deserves special emphasis.

When Gloria entered the room, I switched on the lights and we all yelled "Surprise!"

CAUTION: Do not overuse the exclamation point.

► In the fisherman's memory the fish lives on, increasing in length and weight with each passing year, until at last it is big enough to shade a fishing boat!.

This sentence doesn't need to be pumped up with an exclamation point. It is emphatic enough without it.

► Whenever I see Venus lunging forward to put away an overhead smash, it might as well be me!. She does it just the way I would!

The first exclamation point should be deleted so that the second one will have more force.

P7-d The dash

When typing, use two hyphens to form a dash (--). Do not put spaces before or after the dash. (If your word processing program has what is known as an "em-dash," you may use it instead, with no space before or after it.) Dashes are used for the following purposes.

To set off parenthetical material that deserves emphasis

Everything that went wrong—from the peeping Tom at her window last night to my head-on collision today—was blamed on our move.

To set off appositives that contain commas

An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun. Ordinarily most appositives are set off with commas (see P1-e), but when the appositive contains commas, a pair of dashes helps readers see the relative importance of all the pauses.

In my hometown the basic needs of people—food, clothing, and shelter—are less costly than in Los Angeles.

To prepare for a list, a restatement, an amplification, or a dramatic shift in tone or thought

Along the wall are the bulk liquids—sesame seed oil, honey, safflower oil, maple syrup, and peanut butter.

Consider the amount of sugar in the average person's diet—104 pounds per year, 90 percent more than that consumed by our ancestors.

Everywhere we looked there were little kids—a box of Cracker Jacks in one hand and mommy's or daddy's sleeve in the other.

Kiere took a few steps back, came running full speed, kicked a mighty kick—and missed the ball.

In the first two examples, the writer could also use a colon. (See P4-a.) The colon is more formal than the dash and not quite as dramatic.

CAUTION: Unless there is a specific reason for using the dash, avoid it. Unnecessary dashes create a choppy effect.

► Insisting that our young people learn to use computers as instructional tools—for information retrieval—makes good sense. Herding them—sheeplike—into computer technology does not.

P7-e Parentheses

Use parentheses to enclose supplemental material, minor digressions, and afterthoughts.

After taking her temperature, pulse, and blood pressure (routine vital signs), the nurse made Becky as comfortable as possible.

The weights James was first able to move (not lift, mind you) were measured in ounces.

Use parentheses to enclose letters or numbers labeling items in a series.

Regulations stipulated that only the following equipment could be used on the survival mission: (1) a knife, (2) thirty feet of parachute line, (3) a book of matches, (4) two ponchos, (5) an *E* tool, and (6) a signal flare.