

## Is it a question or an exclamation? Sometimes a sentence can go either way.

### RIGHT:

How could you do that?

### ALSO RIGHT:

How could you do that!

Some people use exclamation points all the time! Every single sentence is so excited it jumps for joy! Nothing looks sillier than a paragraph like this! Even worse than lots of exclamation points are—oh, no, not those!!—double exclamation points!! In formal writing, never (and I do mean *never*!!) use double exclamation points! In fact, don't use many exclamation points at all. Not every sentence you write is exciting enough to deserve an exclamation point, and too many make your reader tired.

(See page 132 for using exclamation points with quotations. See page 106 for using exclamation points with parentheses.)

## BRAIN TICKLERS

*Set # 6*

Find the goofs in these sentences and correct them.

1. Dr Austin Stevens and Gov Hartley Hsu were at the meeting.
2. Did the package arrive c.o.d?
3. I wonder whether it's going to rain?
4. Why did you bring your math teacher a bouquet of flowers instead of bringing her your overdue homework assignment, I wondered?

5. The huge dinosaurs, creatures of the distant past, pictured on the pages of history books roaming vast plains a million years ago, with their gazing eyes and huge bodies, lumbering along with no concern for what lay in their paths, creating terror wherever they roamed.
6. I want to play for the N.F.L. when I grow up.
7. Oh, no, my homework is blowing out the bus window.
8. Wow! I got accepted for the special summer program in Mexico!! I can't wait to go! I'm sure it will be wonderful! It's something I've wanted to do for a long time!!

(Answers are on page 144.)

## Commas

Commas have many jobs to do in the English language, and they are used more than any other mark of punctuation. Before we look at how to use them, let's look at just how important they are. Does it really matter whether your commas are in the right places? You bet it does! Check these out:

### SAY WHAT?

The dog said my dad is scratching at the door and needs to go out for a walk.

### THAT'S MORE LIKE IT:

The dog, said my dad, is scratching at the door and needs to go out for a walk.

### SAY WHAT?

The girls, who sold more Girl Scout cookies, won a trip to the beach. (This implies that there was another group also selling cookies—maybe boys, or parents.)

### THAT'S MORE LIKE IT:

The girls who sold more Girl Scout cookies won a trip to the beach.

### DO YOU MEAN THIS:

Are you going to the movie with Mary Jane?

### OR THIS:

Are you going to the movie with Mary, Jane?

## G AND PUNCTUATING SENTENCES

DO YOU MEAN THIS:

Gabriella is a pretty, good dancer.

OR THIS:

Gabriella is a pretty good dancer.

**Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction that introduces an independent clause (that's a clause that can stand alone as a complete sentence).**

Here are the coordinating conjunctions: *and, but, for, or, so, yet.*

RIGHT:

My sister's name is Miranda. My brother's name is Austin.  
(These are two complete, correct sentences.)

BETTER:

My sister's name is Miranda, and my brother's name is Austin.

RIGHT:

I rushed home. I finished my homework before soccer practice.

BETTER:

I rushed home, and I finished my homework before soccer practice.

WRONG:

I am very good in Spanish, and in French.  
(*And in French* is not a complete sentence.)

RIGHT:

I am very good in Spanish and French.

ALSO RIGHT:

I am very good in Spanish, and I'm good in French.  
(*I'm good in French* is a complete sentence.)

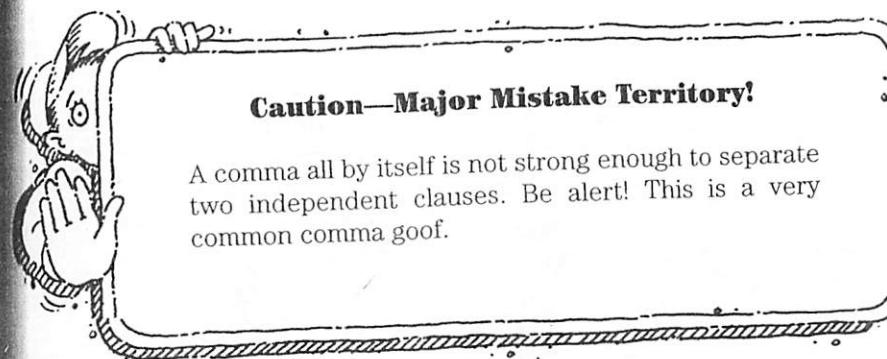
When the two independent clauses are very short, you have a choice:

RIGHT:

Alicia slept late, but Kim got up early.

ALSO RIGHT:

Alicia slept late but Kim got up early.

**Caution—Major Mistake Territory!**

A comma all by itself is not strong enough to separate two independent clauses. Be alert! This is a very common comma goof.

WRONG:

We went to the beach last summer, I learned to surf.

RIGHT:

We went to the beach last summer. I learned to surf.

ALSO RIGHT:

We went to the beach last summer; I learned to surf.

ALSO RIGHT:

We went to the beach last summer, and I learned to surf.

(For when *not* to use commas with conjunctions, see page 53.)

**Use a comma after conjunctive adverbs (those are adverbs working as conjunctions—they link two sentences and show how the two are related).**

Here are some conjunctive adverbs: *however, finally, furthermore, indeed, meanwhile, nevertheless, therefore, unfortunately.*

I thought I made a C+ on the test; however, I made a B+.  
I didn't study very much; nevertheless, I made a good grade.  
I might not be so lucky next time; therefore, I'm going to study right now!

(What are those semicolons doing in these sentences? See page 101.)

**Use a comma after most introductory phrases and clauses.**

Since my mother forgot to pack me a dessert, I ate your Twinkie.

Being a sugar freak, I have to have at least one Twinkie a day.

How do you tell what's introductory and what's not? Find the subject and verb of the sentence. Whatever comes before the subject and verb is usually an introduction.

Since my mother forgot to pack me a dessert, I [subject] ate [verb] your Twinkie.

Don't fall for the temptation to use a comma just because the subject and verb are far apart.

**WRONG:**

Eating too many Twinkies or other sweet things, can give you the sugar jitters.

**RIGHT:**

Eating [subject] too many Twinkies or other sweet things can give [verb] you the sugar jitters.

When the introduction is short, you can omit the comma if you choose.

**RIGHT:**

In June I will be going to camp.

**ALSO RIGHT:**

In June, I will be going to camp.

But beware. What can happen if you don't use commas after introductory phrases and clauses—even short ones? Confusion, that's what!

**CONFUSING:**

After eating my cat hiccups.  
(Do you eat cats often?)

**CLEAR:**

After eating, my cat hiccups.



Notice that if you reverse the order of this sentence (putting the subject and verb first), you no longer have an introduction and no longer need a comma.

My cat hiccups after eating.

**Use commas to emphasize an adverb.****RIGHT:**

Tori ran fast and got home before her mother.

**MORE EMPHASIS:**

Tori ran, fast, and got home before her mother.

**RIGHT:**

He fell off his bicycle hard after he skidded on loose gravel.

**MORE EMPHASIS:**

He fell off his bicycle, hard, after he skidded on loose gravel.

**Use commas when adjectives come after the noun.**

My tennis racket, freshly strung and shiny new, will surely bring me good luck in the tournament.

My language arts teacher, kind of heart and generous of spirit, will surely give me an A if I learn all these comma rules.

**Use commas in lists.****RIGHT:**

Please buy eggs, milk, bread, and cereal at the store.

**RIGHT:**

We studied math, history, health, and grammar.

**OKAY:**

When I go on vacation, I like playing tennis and rollerblading and trying to beat my dad at putt-putt.

**MUCH BETTER:**

When I go on vacation, I like playing tennis, rollerblading, and trying to beat my dad at putt-putt.

Is it okay to omit the last comma? Most newspapers omit it (in order to save space), but many good writers use it.

**OKAY:**

This train goes to Norfolk, Washington, New York, and Boston.

**ALSO OKAY:**

This train goes to Norfolk, Washington, New York and Boston.

Take your pick, but be consistent and be aware of potential problems when you don't use the final comma.

**SAY WHAT?**

I like peanut butter and jelly, macaroni and cheese and bananas covered with chocolate.  
(Macaroni and cheese covered with chocolate? Yuck!)

**MUCH BETTER:**

I like peanut butter and jelly, macaroni and cheese, and bananas covered with chocolate.

**Use commas with cities and states. Notice *both* commas.**

I was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on Valentine's Day.

**Use commas with addresses. Notice there is no comma between the state and the zip code.**

She lives at 225 Valley Road, Hope, Maine 04847.

**Use commas in numbers over 999.**

There were 24,567 deliriously happy fans at the football game.

**EXCEPTIONS:**

years (2010), addresses (4627 Main St.), and telephone numbers

**Use commas with direct quotations (what someone says).**

"There's a big worm in my bed," yelled Becca.  
"I'm eight years old," Kwan said, "and I'm in third grade."

Use commas only with direct quotations, not with indirect quotations.

**DIRECT QUOTATION:**

Kate said, "I want to gallop off into the sunset."  
(This is a straight-forward quotation of what Kate said, using her exact words.)

**INDIRECT QUOTATION:**

Kate said that she wants to gallop off into the sunset.  
(This is my report of what Kate said, but not necessarily using her exact words. Notice there is no comma after *Kate said.*)

**WRONG:**

Parker said, that she wants to swim with dolphins someday.

**RIGHT:**

Parker said that she wants to swim with dolphins someday.

(See pages 129–133 for more about punctuating quotations.)

**Use commas when speaking directly to someone (this is called direct address).**

Keith, it's time to brush your teeth.

I've told you twice, boys and girls, to do your homework.



## Use commas with dates.

### RIGHT:

I was born on Thursday, December 27, 1996, in Boston.  
 (Notice all three commas. It's a very common mistake to leave out one or two.)

### ALSO RIGHT:

I was born in December 1996, in Boston.  
 (When you use just the month and year, only one comma is needed.)

### ALSO RIGHT:

I was born on 27 December 1996 in Boston.  
 (Notice with this form, no commas are used.)

## Use a comma before and/or after an interjection.

(See page 57 for more about interjections.)

Wow, what a beautiful dress.

Hey, that's my lunch! No, I don't want to share my lunch with you.

Well, well, well. My goodness, you've grown so much.  
 I told Ryan that, yes, I'd go with him to the movies.

## Use commas between consecutive adjectives (two or more in a row) describing the same noun.

### RIGHT:

It was a dark, cold, dreary night.  
 (Dark, cold, and dreary all describe the noun *night*.)

### ALSO RIGHT:

It was a cold September night.  
 (Cold and September both describe the noun *night*, but no comma is used. When do you use a comma and when don't you? Use a comma wherever the word *and* would sound right.)

### RIGHT:

I bought some expensive, stylish white tennis shoes.

- Does this sound okay: *expensive and stylish shoes?* Yes, so the comma is needed between them.
- Does this sound okay: *stylish and white shoes?* That one's iffy. It's okay to leave out the comma.
- Does this sound okay: *white and tennis shoes?* No, so don't use a comma there.

Here's another trick: use a comma when you could switch the order of the adjectives and the sentence would still sound right.

### RIGHT:

I wore blue tennis shoes.

(Does this sound okay: *I wore tennis blue shoes?* No, so no comma is needed.)

### RIGHT:

It was a dark, cold, dreary night.

(Does this sound okay: *It was a cold, dark night?* Yes, so the comma is needed. Does this sound okay: *It was a dreary, cold night?* Yes, so that comma is also needed.)

Alert! Don't put a comma before the noun.

### WRONG:

I ate a beautiful, ripe, delicious, firm, apple.

### RIGHT:

I ate a beautiful, ripe, delicious, firm apple.

## Use commas before and/or after some Latin abbreviations.

### RIGHT:

I love sports, e.g., baseball, basketball, and football.  
 (E.g. means "for example.")

### RIGHT:

A vet works with many types of animals—dogs, cats, horses, cows, etc.  
 (Etc. means "and so forth.")

## **Use commas before and after parenthetical expressions.**

By-the-way phrases are words inserted into a sentence giving information or thoughts that are not absolutely essential.

**RIGHT:**

I reminded Mom, in case she'd forgotten, that I really want an iPod for my birthday.

**RIGHT:**

They usually cost, if you get a good deal, about \$200.

**RIGHT:**

Since she's the best mom in the world, or at least that's what I tell her to get her to do whatever I want, I'm sure she'll get me one.

(See page 103 for more about parenthetical expressions.)

## **Use commas after greetings and before closings in friendly letters.**

**GREETING:**

Dear Kareem,

**GREETING:**

Dear Mom,

**CLOSING:**

Love,

**CLOSING:**

Sincerely,

**WRONG:**

Dear Governor Sutton,

**RIGHT:**

Dear Governor Sutton:

(This is not a friendly letter. It's a formal letter, and a colon should be used.)

## **Use a comma to show that two parts of a sentence are being contrasted.**

**RIGHT:**

I ordered pizza, not lasagna.

**RIGHT:**

I'm going out with Kevin, not Sam.

## **Use commas with titles when they come after (but not before) the person's name.**

Notice the commas before and after the title.

**RIGHT:**

Arith Metic, Ph.D., is my math teacher.

**BUT NO COMMAS HERE:**

Dr. Metic is my math teacher.

**RIGHT:**

Jacques Roche, D.V.M., is a famous cockroach veterinarian.

**BUT NO COMMAS HERE:**

Dr. Roche is a famous cockroach veterinarian.



## **Use commas before and after appositives (an appositive explains who or what the noun is).**

**RIGHT:**

Our principal, John Bossman, gave a great speech.

(The subject is *principal*. The appositive, *John Bossman*, tells more about who the subject is.)

**BUT NO COMMAS HERE:**

Principal John Bossman gave a great speech.

(In this case *John Bossman* is part of the subject. If you leave out his name, the sentence doesn't make sense.)

**RIGHT:**

Katie Stevens, the best ballerina in the performance, shone as the star of the evening.

(*The best ballerina in the performance* explains who Katie Stevens is.)

BUT NO COMMAS HERE:

Ballerina Katie Stevens shone as the star of the evening.  
*(Ballerina Katie Stevens is all one unit, not one phrase telling more about another phrase.)*

RIGHT:

Joshua Zinn, world-famous aardvark trainer, will be in town next week to demonstrate his great skills.  
*(World-famous aardvark trainer explains who Joshua Zinn is.)*

BUT NO COMMAS HERE:

World-famous aardvark trainer Joshua Zinn will be in town next week to demonstrate his great skills.  
*(World-famous aardvark trainer Joshua Zinn is all one unit, not one phrase telling more about another phrase.)*

**Use commas to indicate omitted words.**RIGHT:

I ordered chicken; Amanda, fish.  
*(This means "I ordered chicken; Amanda ordered fish.")*

RIGHT:

Tonight I will study math; tomorrow, Spanish.  
*(This means "Tonight I will study math; tomorrow I will study Spanish.")*

Even though I thought of making up another rule just for fun one about commas I decided that by this time you probably have commas coming out your ears and after all when you have commas coming out your ears your ears need a break so a break you shall have.

... hmmmm ... where should the commas go in that sentence?



## **BRAIN TICKLERS**

### **Set # 7**

Find the goofs in these sentences and correct them.

1. At the fair, I ate cotton candy, a caramel apple and, a foot-long hot dog.
2. I pigged out on food at the fair, and got a stomachache as a result.
3. Dad was tired but, he kept driving until we finally arrived at the beach.
4. Mom said, "I'm warning you! I can't take much more of this honey."
5. I live in a charming, old, nineteenth-century, house.
6. We will meet on Monday December 25, 2006.
7. People from Raleigh, North Carolina often vacation at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.
8. I admit that yes I did put that turtle in the toilet.
9. The tall guy on the basketball team Legs Long is my neighbor.
10. The new kid on the tennis team whom I beat last week won the tournament.
11. Everyone, who hasn't finished the test, must stay after school to finish it.
12. Just as I was about to paint my sister Rose walked in.
13. I know I said I'd be there at 9:00, but hey I didn't count on twelve inches of snow.
14. I called you Becca just to say hello.
15. Allison bought a lacy, bright, red dress.

(Answers are on page 145.)

## Colons

**Use a colon when you want to say "here comes an example" or "here's what I'm talking about."**

**RIGHT:**

This sentence is grammatically correct: I wonder if wolves actually wolf down their pizzas the way I wolf down mine.

**RIGHT:**

There's one thing I love more than anything else in the world: a grammatically correct sentence.

**RIGHT:**

There's only one sport for me: alligator wrestling.

Notice how colons are used after the words *right* and *wrong* in this book. The colon says "here comes an example."

### Use a colon before some lists.

A colon is needed when you use these phrases: *these are*, *there are*, *the following*, *as follows*, *such as*, or *these things*.

**RIGHT:**

My favorite sports are the following: baseball, basketball, soccer, football, squash, racketball, tennis, lacrosse, golf, and every other game that's played with a ball.

**WRONG:**

The ingredients are: flour, eggs, sugar, milk, and chocolate.  
(Don't use a colon if the list comes right after a verb.)

**RIGHT:**

The ingredients are flour, eggs, sugar, milk, and chocolate.

**ALSO RIGHT:**

These are the ingredients: flour, eggs, sugar, milk, and chocolate.

**WRONG:**

I want to travel to: New York, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Montreal.  
(Don't use a colon if the list comes right after a preposition.)



RIGHT:

I want to travel to New York, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Montreal.

ALSO RIGHT:

I want to travel to the following cities: New York, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Montreal.

**Use a colon before subtitles of books, articles, chapters, etc.**

The title of the book is *Michael Jordan: Basketball Superman*.

**Use colons with expressions of time.**

It's 12:15 P.M.

His record for the mile is 4:06:27.

**Use a colon in the greeting part of a formal letter or business letter.**

To Whom It May Concern:

Dear Senator Kirkpatrick:

**Use a colon in literary references between volume and page or between chapter and verse.**

*John 3:16* [the book of John, chapter 3, verse 16]

*Encyclopedia Britannica IV:425* [volume 4, page 425]

**Use a colon with ratios.**

The bill passed easily; the vote was 3:1. [three to one]

**Use colons to indicate dialogue when you're writing a play or a script (and notice there are no quotation marks when you write dialogue this way).**

Brian: I want to play baseball.

Mike: Great idea.

Brian: I'll get my gear and you get yours.

Mike: Meet you at the field.

**Use a colon before a long, formal quotation.**

Governor Smith stated to the press: "I think that children should study grammar for at least six hours a day. Learning to speak and write correctly is far more important than anything else—including eating. In fact, I believe that eating is a complete waste of valuable time. And that is why I'm suggesting that lunch period be canceled and that students study grammar instead of eating while they are at school."

Fortunately, Governor Smith then said, "April Fools'!"

**Use a colon after words such as *caution*, *wanted*, or *note*.**

Caution: slippery floor

Wanted: part-time waitresses and waiters

Note: We're almost finished with colons!

**Capitalize the first word after a colon if it begins a complete sentence—and if you want to. Either way is okay; it's your choice.**

WRONG:

These are the ingredients: Apples, olives, sugar, onions, artichokes, and chocolate. Sounds yummy, doesn't it? (Apples does not begin a complete sentence.)

RIGHT:

These are the ingredients: apples, olives, sugar, onions, artichokes, and chocolate. Sounds yummy, doesn't it?

RIGHT:

I'm sure you know the old saying about apples: An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

(An begins a complete sentence.)

ALSO RIGHT:

I'm sure you know the old saying about apples: an apple a day keeps the doctor away.

## Semicolons

**Use a semicolon between two sentences that are very closely related.**

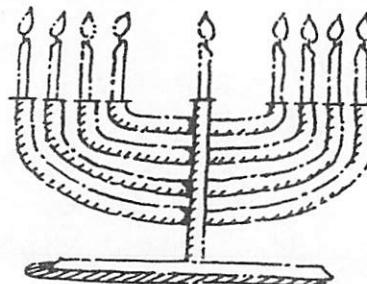
RIGHT:

My family is Jewish. We celebrate Chanukah but not Christmas.

BETTER:

My family is Jewish; we celebrate Chanukah but not Christmas.

(Being Jewish and celebrating Chanukah are very closely related, and that relationship is emphasized by putting them in the same sentence.)



WRONG:

My family is Jewish; not Christian.

(*Not Christian* is not a complete sentence. Use a semicolon only between two complete sentences.)

RIGHT:

My family is Jewish, not Christian.

RIGHT:

My dad is a coach at the university. We get free tickets to any sports event we want to see.

(These two sentences are very closely related.)

BETTER:

My dad is a coach at the university; we get free tickets to any sports event we want to see.

WRONG:

My dad is a coach at the university; we have some cousins who live in Texas.

(*Being a coach* and *having cousins in Texas* are not closely related.)

RIGHT:

My dad is a coach at the university. We have some cousins who live in Texas.

WRONG:

I have three dogs; and two of them are golden retrievers.  
(When you use a semicolon, don't use a conjunction.)

RIGHT:

I have three dogs; two of them are golden retrievers.

ALSO RIGHT:

I have three dogs, and two of them are golden retrievers.

**Use a semicolon before *however* and similar words (these words are called conjunctive adverbs) that show a relationship between two complete sentences.**

WRONG:

I bet you thought you wouldn't have to learn another semicolon rule, however, you were wrong.

RIGHT:

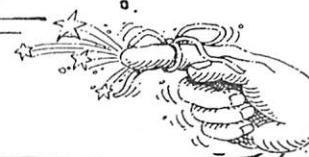
I bet you thought you wouldn't have to learn another semicolon rule; however, you were wrong.

ALSO RIGHT:

I bet you thought you wouldn't have to learn another semicolon rule. However, you were wrong.

Here are some other conjunctive adverbs: *also*, *besides*, *indeed*, *otherwise*, *therefore*, *in fact*, *meanwhile*, *in addition*, *consequently*, *nevertheless*, *next*, *still*, *finally*, *earlier*, *naturally*, *certainly*.

A semicolon is stronger than a comma but slightly weaker than a period.



### Use semicolons between clauses or phrases that contain a lot of commas.

#### CONFUSING:

Wesley likes books about baseball, biplanes, and bagels, Brian likes books about antique cars, blimps, and rare fish, and Tori likes books about racehorses, dolls, and military jets.

#### BETTER:

Wesley likes books about baseball, biplanes, and bagels; Brian likes books about antique cars, blimps, and rare fish; and Tori likes books about racehorses, dolls, and military jets.

#### CONFUSING:

We saw Meg, captain of the basketball team, Marshall, captain of the tennis team, Syman, captain of the crew, and Lisa, captain of the volleyball team.

#### BETTER:

We saw Meg, captain of the basketball team; Marshall, captain of the tennis team; Syman, captain of the crew; and Lisa, captain of the volleyball team.

#### ALSO GOOD:

We saw Meg (captain of the basketball team), Marshall (captain of the tennis team), Syman (captain of the crew), and Lisa (captain of the volleyball team).



## BRAIN TICKLERS

### Set # 8

Find the goofs in these sentences and correct them.

1. I want to see the new ninja movie, I want to see the new Spider-Man movie, too.
2. When you go to the store, please pick up: apples, bread, and juice.
3. Mom said that only one thing will earn me an increase in allowance: A consistently clean room.
4. I love the colors green, blue, and red, the names Vanessa, Charlotte, and Cassandra, the states Iowa, Idaho, and Illinois, but not the foods anchovies, olives, and eggplant.
5. I was on the swim team last year, we had a winning season.
6. I like chocolate cake; my dad cooks great spaghetti.
7. This is the weather report for tomorrow, heavy rain, gusty winds, and a chance of flooding.
8. I hoped it would snow, finally, it did.

(Answers are on page 148.)

## Parentheses

Use parentheses to set off parenthetical expressions from the main part of the sentence.

What is a parenthetical expression? It is by-the-way information (inserted in the middle of a sentence, like this) that isn't absolutely necessary. Notice in all the following examples that