

# Some Rules/ Conventions Regarding Punctuation Marks

Module 1 (Grammar)  
EE 350 (Technical Communications)

# The Optional Oxford Comma

I went to the market this morning and bought bread, milk, eggs,  
and a bottle of orange juice.



*comma after  
the penultimate  
item*

# Using Comma with Adjectives

*If you want to suggest that the adjectives are independent, use commas.*

I want to hire smart, well-read people in my company.

# Using Comma with Adjectives

*If you want to suggest that the adjectives are dependent, do not use commas.*

**I wish I lived in a house with a view of a deep blue sea.**

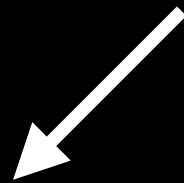
**Adding a hidden layer of non-linear activation functions improves the classification accuracy of the neural network.**

# Comma vs Semicolon

To use commas and semicolons properly, it's important to have some working understanding of phrases, clauses, and sentence structures.

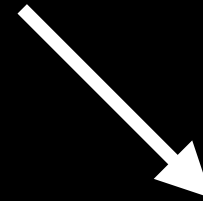
# **Phrases and Clauses**

**(both add extra information in a sentence)**



## **Phrases**

**(don't have both a  
subject and  
a predicate)**



## **Clauses**

**(have both a subject  
and a predicate)**

# **Phrases and Clauses**

**(both add extra information in a sentence)**

```
graph TD; A["Phrases and Clauses  
(both add extra information in a sentence)"] --> B["Phrases"]; A --> C["Clauses"]; C --> D["Dependent clause"]; C --> E["Independent clause"]; D --- F["(the subject is: which,  
who, that etc.,  
so the clause  
doesn't have  
an independent existence.)"]; E --- G["(can have an  
independent  
existence)"]
```

**Phrases**

**Clauses**

**Dependent clause**

**(the subject is: which,  
who, that etc.,  
so the clause  
doesn't have  
an independent existence.)**

**Independent clause**

**(can have an  
independent  
existence)**

# Using commas with phrases (underlined)

*Examples with no comma (putting a comma here will make it incorrect):*

1. I'm teaching you how to use commas in sentences.
2. The nurse for this particular hospital ward has a heart of gold.
3. Birds of the same feather flock together.
4. People living in glass houses should not throw stones.



# Using commas with phrases (underlined)

*Examples that need a comma (not putting a comma here will make it incorrect):*

1. Angela, the nurse for this particular hospital ward, has a heard of gold.
2. Who do you like more: Kohli, the team captain, or Kohli, the prolific batsman?

# Using commas with phrases (underlined)

*Examples with an optional comma:*

1. Hearing the bell, we rushed out of our rooms.
2. Upon his return, the king declared his son to be the heir of his kingdom.

# Using commas with dependent clauses (underlined)

*Examples with no comma (when the clause provides compulsory information for the sentence, putting a comma will make it incorrect):*

1. Birds that are of the same feather flock together.
2. People who live in glass houses should not throw stones.

# Using commas with dependent clauses (underlined)

*Examples with an optional comma (when the sentence is meaningful even without the clause):*

1. Angela, who is the nurse for this particular hospital ward, has a heard of gold.
2. Did you watch the Ashes, which just got over yesterday?

# Using commas with independent clauses (underlined)

*When two independent clauses are connected through a conjunction like 'but', 'so', 'and', etc., use a comma:*

The nurse has a heart of gold, but she couldn't be of much help.

*Variation (the second clause becomes a phrase now):*

The nurse has a heart of gold but couldn't be of much help.

*(You can't use a comma or a semicolon now)*

*Another variation:*

The nurse has a heart of gold. But she couldn't be of much help.

# Using commas with independent clauses (underlined)

*When two independent clauses are connected through a conjunction like 'but', 'so', 'and', etc., use a comma:*

Don Bradman was a prolific batsman, and he was also a good captain.

*Variation (the second clause becomes a phrase now):*

Don Bradman was a prolific batsman and also a good captain.

**Another variation:**

**Don Bradman was a prolific batsman. And he was also a good captain.**

# Using semicolons with independent clauses

**When two independent clauses are *not* connected through a conjunction like ‘but’, ‘so’, ‘and’, etc., use a semicolon:**

**Don Bradman was a prolific batsman; he was also a good captain.**

***The comma is not correct here, but people often use it:***

**Don Bradman was a prolific batsman, he was also a good captain.**

# Semicolons with independent clauses to establish causal relationship

Once Rusty's father died, he hardly had any company; he spent most of his time reading books.

*(The conjunction 'so' is avoided here. In fiction, you avoid 'so', 'but', 'however', 'therefore' etc., but not in technical articles.)*



Hyphen (-),  
En dash (–),  
and Em dash (—)

# En dash (–)

*To suggest duration:*

**Humans have lived on this planet for 200,000–300,000 years.**

**Each neuron in the brain is connected to 80,000–100,000 other neurons through synapses.**

***(Disclaimer: The numbers I used here are not completely based on facts.)***

# Em dash (—)

*To insert an extra phrase within a sentence:*

**It is a good sound to read by — the rain outside, the quiet within — and, although tin roofs are given to springing unaccountable leaks, there is a feeling of being untouched by, and yet in touch with, the rain.**

**(From Ruskin Bond's 'Sounds I Like to Hear')**

# Em dash (—)

*To insert an extra clause within a sentence:*

**Dualities like this — situations in which two very different theories accurately describe the same phenomenon — are consistent with model-dependent realism.**

**(From Stephen Hawking's 'The Grand Design')**

*Alternative version (more common in technical articles):*

**Dualities like this (situations in which two very different theories accurately describe the same phenomenon) are consistent with model-dependent realism.**

# Hyphen (-)

*To join two words when the second word is a noun and the first word is another noun, but they act together*

**air-conditioner**

**air-crew**

**chat-room**

*The hyphens have often been dropped over time when the words are short:*

**bookshelf, bookworm, notebook, waistcoat**

# Hyphen (-)

*To join the constituents of a compound adjective:*

Who would you choose between a prince with a lot of inherited property and a self-made billionaire?

For a thirteen-year-old boy, stepping out of his village for the first time and arriving in Mumbai can be quite overwhelming.

How, under the table-disappears-when-I-leave-the-room model, could I account for the fact that the next time I enter, the table reappears broken, under the debris of the ceiling?  
(From Stephen Hawking's The Grand Design)

# Hyphen (-)

*To join the constituents of a compound adjective:*

The spin-orbit-torque-driven domain-wall device has been considered as a synaptic device for neuromorphic computing.

Spin-based devices consume less energy when compared to charge-based devices, but they are slower than charge-based devices.