Punctuation

Commas

1. Commas are needed to separate three or more items in a series.

Example: The trick-or-treaters collected gum, candy, popcorn, and coins.

1. The comma separates the introductory words in a sentence.

Example: Carrying her popcorn, Sylvia looked for a seat in the theater.

1. Commas are used around words that interrupt the flow of a sentence and in direct address.

Example: Mata Hari, a famous spy and exotic dancer, reportedly charged her lovers $7,500 to spend the night with her.

1. Commas are used before the connecting words *and, or, nor, but, yet,* and *so* to combine two complete thoughts in one sentence.

Example: My father wanted to attend college, but his family didn’t have the money.

1. Note: Don’t add a comma just because the sentence has a connecting word in it. Make sure the sentence expresses two complete thoughts when using a comma before the connecting word.

Example: Lois spent two hours in the gym and then went to class.

1. Commas are used to separate directly quoted material from the rest of the sentence.

Example: “Look out below,” shouted the window washer.

The window washer shouted, “Look out below.”

“All I want,” said Jeff wearily, “is to crawl into bed.”

1. Commas are used to separate, dates, addresses, and specific locations.

Example: The train arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts on Friday, February 24, 2013.

Apostrophes

1. Apostrophes are used when forming contractions, i.e., when combining two words into one. The apostrophe takes the place of the omitted letter(s).

Examples: I + am = I’m, it + is = it’s, does + not= doesn’t, do + not = don’t, they + are=they’re, will + not = won’t, can + not=can’t

1. Apostrophes are used to show possession (to show that something belongs to someone or something).
2. To make a singular noun possessive, add an apostrophe plus an *s, even if the word ends in an* s.
3. To make a plural noun possessive, add an apostrophe to the noun if the plural ends in *s.*

Examples: boy’s/boys’, wolf’s/wolves’

1. If the plural noun does not end in *s,* add an ‘*s* to the plural noun.

Examples: woman’s / women’s, child’s/children’s

Note: Possessive adjectives, such as my, your, his, hers, its, our, and their, do not use apostrophes. These words already express possession.

Semicolon

1. Use a semicolon to join two complete thoughts not connected by a joining word.

Example: Lana cleans the house and cooks; Jason mows the grass and watches TV.

1. Use a semicolon to join complete statements with a transitional word, such as *however, moreover, therefore, furthermore, thus, also, consequently, otherwise, nevertheless, then, now, in addition, in fact*, and *as a result.* A comma follows these words.

Example: I’ve never liked my brother-in-law; furthermore, he knows it.

Colon

1. Use a colon to introduce a list.

Example: The bag lady’s possessions were few: a shopping cart, a blanket, and two ragged garments.

1. Use a colon to introduce a long or literary quotation.

Example: *A Tale of Two Cities* begins with these well-known words: “It was the best of times…”

1. Use a colon to introduce a final fact or explanation.

Example: There’s only one explanation for her behavior: she’s jealous.

Quotation Marks

1. Use double quotation marks around direct quotations. Remember to cite.

When there is a quote within a quote, use single quotes round the internal quote.

Example: Mary McCarthy said, “Every word she writes is a lie, including ‘a’ and ‘the’” (89).

1. Use quotation marks to quote prose or poetry. Use a tag followed by a comma to introduce quotes.

Examples: James Baldwin said, “The challenge is in the moment; the time is always now” (83).

James Baldwin said it best: “The challenge is in the moment; the time is always now” (83).

1. Use quotation marks to quote partial sentences. If you use only part of a sentence, then don’t start the quote with a capital letter. Otherwise, begin a quote with a capital letter.

Example: James Baldwin said that “the time is always now” (83).

1. Use an ellipsis (…) to indicate the words omitted from a quote.

Example: James Baldwin said that “the time is …now” (83).

1. Put brackets around words inserted for clarification that are not part of the quote.

Example: Thomas Paine wrote that “it is dearness [high cost] only that gives everything its value” (24).

1. Use quotation marks with dialogue. Put actual words spoken by a person in quotation marks. Use commas to set off tags at the beginning, middle, or end of dialogue. Start a new paragraph whenever you switch speakers.
2. Use quotation marks around words that are being singled out for definition or indicate irony.
3. Use quotation marks to set off the title of a short work. Short works include short stories, newspaper or magazine articles, song titles, poems, episodes of television shows, and chapters of books. The titles of longer works, such as books, newspapers, magazines, plays, movies, television series, and albums, should be italicized.

Example:

The writing seminar assignments include an analysis of “The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant, a short story found in our text *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction.* Additional assignmentswill be a comparison of Stephen King’s short story “The Body” and the movie *Stand by Me,* and a rhetorical analysis of a photograph from *National Geographic.* I hope we get to read and discuss “Jimmy’s World,” an article in the *Washington Times.*