

# Punctuation Guide

Punctuation can be tricky. Here are a few tips concerning the purposes and proper uses of different punctuation marks (the Fragments and Run-Ons handout provides more information):

## 1. COMMAS

### 1. Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction to connect two independent clauses.

(Examples of coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)

She spent hours cleaning her room, but she still failed her room check.

He was a feisty fellow, and everyone knew it.

Will I take the elevator, or will I take the stairs?

### 2. Use a comma when a subordinating conjunction is part of an introductory phrase or clause, but not when it begins the second clause of a sentence.

(Examples of subordinating conjunctions: after, although, because, except, than, while)

Although the people walked slowly, the geese continually attacked them.

The geese continually attacked the people although they walked slowly.

Because he stayed up late to write his paper, he fell asleep in class.

He fell asleep in class because he stayed up late to write his paper.

### 3. Use a comma to separate nonessential elements in a sentence.

A phrase is nonessential if one can still understand the meaning of the sentence without it.

The audience, which was made up of many fellow students, applauded enthusiastically.

Mr. Parker, who had played ball in high school, volunteered to help coach the team.

Our first thought, to run to the nearest exit, would have resulted in panic.

### 4. Use commas to separate words in a series of three or more.

As a college student, my skills are socializing, procrastinating, and staying up late.

Cars, trucks, buses, and motorcycles roared past the lone pedestrian. **You do need a comma before "and."**

Study the rules for the use of the comma, the semicolon, and the colon.

### 5. Use commas to provide more clarity, not more confusion, especially between repeated words.

Ideally, you should rephrase the sentence to avoid repeated words.

**INCORRECT:** Now now, you don't expect me to believe that!

**CORRECT:** Now, now, you don't expect me to believe that!

**INCORRECT:** All any insurance policy is is a contract for services

**CORRECT:** All any insurance policy is, is a contract for services.

**BETTER:** Any insurance policy is a contract for services.

### 6. Use a comma to designate a question at the end of a sentence.

College students often ask, "Is the purpose of writing papers to help me learn or to make me miserable?"

He looked down at the goose, stared up at the sky, and thought, "Why?" **You do not have to capitalize the first word of the question, but it helps with clarity.**

### 7. Use commas purposefully, not because you think the phrase needs one.

**You should not use a comma to indicate a breath or a pause in speech.**

**INCORRECT:** You are, a good friend. (1 extra comma is used.)

**CORRECT:** You are a good friend. (No commas are needed.)

## 8. Avoid these common comma errors:

### a. A comma between main points in a sentence

**INCORRECT:** Students who do not understand Turabian, will have difficulty writing.

**CORRECT:** Students who do not understand Turabian will have difficulty writing.

### b. A comma between two words or phrases, (or dependent clauses), joined by and, but, or, nor, or yet

A dependent clause does not contain a subject, (something that performs the action of the verb).

**INCORRECT:** The wind was strong, and almost knocked her over.

**CORRECT:** The wind was strong and almost knocked her over.

### c. A comma alone when connecting two independent clauses (sentences) (This is also called a comma splice.)

**INCORRECT:** The people were hiding in the basement, there was no tornado.

**CORRECT:** The people were hiding in the basement, but there was no tornado.

**CORRECT:** The people were hiding in the basement; there was no tornado.

## 2. SEMICOLONS

### 1. Use a semicolon, (without a coordinating conjunction), to connect two independent clauses.

She spent hours cleaning her room; she still failed her room check.

He was a feisty fellow; everyone knew it.

### 2. Use a semicolon before a coordinating conjunction to connect two independent clauses, if at least one of the clauses contains commas.

Ashley, Philip, and Celeste worked for days on their group project; but they had only finished half of it by the night before it was due.

Kansas City, which is known for its exceptional barbecue, is a popular tourist spot; and people travel many miles only to eat a few ribs.

### 3. Use a semicolon between two independent clauses that are joined by transitional words.

Today is Friday; therefore, students can wear jeans.

### 4. Use a semicolon between items in a series of three or more if the items themselves contain commas.

Many students are from Belton, Missouri; Topeka, Kansas; and Little Rock, Arkansas.

Calvary is great because of its dedicated faculty; small campus, which is located near Kansas City; and magnificent student body.

### 5. Do not use a semicolon in place of a colon.

**INCORRECT:** The Learning Center provides these three services; paper editing, exam proctoring, and assistance with studying.

**CORRECT:** The Learning Center provides these three services: paper editing, exam proctoring, and assistance with studying.

### 3. COLONS

**1. Only use a colon after statements that are complete sentences.**

**INCORRECT:** To get good grades, you should: study regularly, complete your assignments well, and organize your time.

**CORRECT:** To get good grades, you should take this advice: study regularly, complete your assignments well, and organize your time.

**2. Use a colon (instead of a semicolon) between two independent clauses when the second clause explains, illustrates, or paraphrases the first.**

I have a good excuse for not turning in my homework: my dog ate it.

Every college student chooses a major: some major in sciences, and others in arts.

She got what she worked for: she really deserved that A+.

**3. Use a colon to announce a piece of information, a list, or a quote.**

*(Think of the colon as a trumpet heralding the information.)*

This is the best thing about Kansas City: **The Royals.**

To get good grades, you should take this advice: **study regularly, complete your assignments well, and organize your time.**

Ecclesiastes 9:4 ([ESV]) says this: **"But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion."**

**4. Use a colon to introduce a numbered or bullet-pointed list.**

These are three major hurdles for college students:

1. stress
2. procrastination
3. balancing social life and diligence in studies

### 4. PERIODS

**1. Use a period at the end of a complete sentence and to separate two sentences or independent clauses.**

Welcome to my humble abode. Would you like a cup of tea?

**2. Do not use a period after a sentence fragment.**

*(A fragment is an independent clause or an incomplete sentence.)*

**INCORRECT:** Although caffeine does cause convulsions and death in certain animals.

Many college students continue to consume excessive amounts of it.

**CORRECT:** Although caffeine does cause convulsions and death in certain animals, many college students continue to consume excessive amounts of it.

**3. Do not use a period in place of a comma, semicolon, or colon.**

**INCORRECT:** She had three friends. Ashley, a volleyball player. Philip, a basketball player. And Celeste, a dancer.

**CORRECT:** She had three friends: Ashley, a volleyball player; Philip, a basketball player; and Celeste, a dancer.

**4. Use a period to mark an abbreviations, but not abbreviations of time eras, ordinal directions, academic degrees, or state names.**

*For more examples of formatting of abbreviations, see the Turabian Manual, section 24.*

Sunday → **Sun.**                      January → **Jan.**                      Before Christ → **BC** (no periods)

Avenue → **Ave.**                      North → **N.**                              Northwest → **NW** (no periods)

Sergeant → **Sgt.**                      ante meridiem → **a.m.**                      Dr. of Education → **EdD** (no periods)

## 5. APOSTROPHES

### 1. Use an apostrophe to designate possession.

For more examples of formatting of possessives, see the Turabian Manual, section 20.2.

You do need the additional "s" on Jesus's.

#### a. Possession by a single noun—apostrophe and "s"

You cannot turn that in; that is **Celeste's** paper.

Jesus's disciples were not the brightest.

##### i. In *For...sake* phrases that end with an "s" or an "s" sound, use apostrophe "s."

For **goodness's** sake

For **righteousness's** sake

For **appearance's** sake

For your own sake

##### ii. To avoid awkward results, rephrasing is sometimes a better option.

"The economy of the United States" *instead of* "The United States' economy"

#### b. Possession by a plural noun

##### i. If the noun ends with "s," use only an apostrophe.

The **teachers'** pens

The **students'** homework

##### ii. If the noun does not end with "s," use an apostrophe and "s."

The **geese's** attacks

The **children's** home

**Brothers-in-law's**

##### ii. If the noun refers to a group or collective entity that is treated as grammatically singular, use only an apostrophe.

The United States'

Politics'

#### c. Possession by multiple nouns

##### i. If the owners share the item, use only one apostrophe

Ashley and Philip wrote a paper together. In class, the teacher collected Ashley and Philip's paper.

America and Great Britain both fought in the war of 1812. The book is about America and Great Britain's war.

##### ii. If the owners each possess their own of the item, use an apostrophe for each owner.

Ashley and Philip each wrote a paper. In class, the teacher collected Ashley's and Philip's papers.

America and Great Britain do not share the same history. The book is about America's and Great Britain's history.

### 2. Use an apostrophe to create contractions.

However, remember that in Turabian, no contractions are allowed. The apostrophe replaces the letters that are removed from the word.

Do not → **Don't**

I am → **I'm**

Why did → **Why'd**

It was → **'Twas**

You will → **You'll**

He had → **He'd**

### 3. Use an apostrophe to shorten/abbreviate.

Like in contractions, the apostrophe replaces the letters (or numbers) that are removed.

Continued → **Cont'd.**

The 1990s → The **'90s**

### 4. Use apostrophes, not quotation marks, to set off words and concepts.

The word **'special'** carries multiple connotations.

Philosophies like **'ableism'**, **'antinatalism'**, and **'biolibertarianism'** subtract from the value of human life.

5. Do not use an apostrophe to make a word, capital letter, abbreviation, or year plural.

**INCORRECT:**

Apostrophe's                      A's, B's, and C's                      URL's                      PhD's                      The 1950's

**CORRECT:**

Apostrophes                      As, Bs, and Cs                      URLs                      PhDs                      The 1950s

However, **use an apostrophe to make a lowercase letter plural.**

a's and b's

x's and y's

6. Use apostrophes to designate a quote or dialog within a quote.

In block quotes, which are not contained within quotation marks, use normal quotation marks to designate quotes within quotes.

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (John 14:6 [NIV]).

## 6. HYPHENS AND DASHES

1. Use a hyphen between the two words in a compound word, only if the compound word precedes that which it modifies.

Not all compound words should be hyphenated. For more specifications about compound words and hyphens, see the Turabian Manual, section 20.3.

Open-ended questions                      BUT                      The questions were open ended.

Well-loved professor                      BUT                      The professor was well loved.

The decision-making process                      BUT                      Decision making is a rare skill.

A you-wish-you-were-as-cool-as-me look

BUT

She glanced at me with a look that spoke, "you wish you were as cool as me."

However, **do not use a hyphen between the two words in a compound word if they are accompanied by an adverb modifier.**

Open-ended questions                      BUT                      Somewhat open ended questions

Well-loved professor                      BUT                      Very well loved professor

2. Use a hyphen compounds including numbers.

**Fractions:**

Two-thirds                      Quarter-mile run

**Adjectives:**

Twenty-year-old student                      BUT                      The student is twenty years old.

365-day year                      BUT                      A year is 365 days.

3. Use a hyphen between compound proper nouns, only if the first word is shortened, or if the two words could be joined by 'and'.

African American → Afro-American

Spanish and English dictionary → Spanish-English dictionary

**4. Use a hyphen in words formed with prefixes, only if**

**a. the prefix is combined with a capital word.**

sub-Saharan BUT subdivision

**b. the prefix is combined with a number.**

pre-1950s BUT predisposed

**c. the prefix ends in the same letter that the word begins with.**

anti-intellectual BUT antidepressant

**d. the prefix precedes a compound word.**

non-coffee-drinking BUT nonbelief

**e. the prefix is repeated as a prefix in the word.**

sub-subentry BUT rerecorded (not used as a prefix)

**f. the prefix stands alone.**

over-and underused macro-and microeconomics

**5. Use a hyphen to express 'through' or 'to' within inclusive terms.**

Genesis-Deuteronomy pages 1-10

**6. Use an em-dash to distinguish a break in a sentence.**

To type an em-dash, go to 'Insert' → 'Symbol', and locate the em-dash.

To type an em-dash between two words, type two dashes and press 'space' or 'enter' after the second word. The two dashes will autocorrect into an em-dash.

It had snowed yesterday—although it was seventy degrees today—and the melted snow ran like a river down the street.

**7. Use an em-dash to add an explanatory element to a sentence.**

The Learning Center is a great place—one can study, snack, or purchase items there.

**8. Use a two em-dash to indicate a missing word from a mutilated or illegible text.**

A two em-dash is just two em-dashes put together without a space between them.

"hyrde ic þæt—wæs Onelan cwen" (Beowulf, line 62)

**9. Use a two em-dash to obscure a word.**

It was a d—shame.

**10. Use a three em-dash in place of an author's name in the reference list if another source from the same author is listed.**

Levy, David M. 1996. *The Tabernacle: Shadows of the Messiah*. Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

— 2004. *What Every Jewish Person Should Ask*. Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

## 7. SLASHES

**Use a slash to represent a line break when quoting poetry.**

"Mine eye hath played the painter and hath steeled Thy beauty's form in table of my heart. My body is the frame wherein 'tis held. And perspective that is best painter's art" (Shakespeare 1840).

## 8. QUOTATION MARKS

**1. Use quotation marks to set off quoted material.**

The Turabian Manual says that if you are writing a class paper, your instructor may also ask you to follow certain principles for punctuation (Turabian 2010, 294).

**2. Use quotation marks to set off dialog.**

Celeste said, "I hate geese with all of my heart."

**3. Use quotation marks to indicate the titles of chapters, short stories, poems, essays, journal articles, individual episodes of TV programs, short musical compositions, theses and dissertations, and lectures.**

See the Turabian Manual, section 22.3.2.

In the *Sesame Street* episode "Elmo Steps in for Super Grover," Elmo helps Baby Bear find his missing stuffed animal.

## 9. PARENTHESES AND BRACKETS

**1. Use parentheses to set off interrupting or explanatory elements.**

She had just come from math class, (her least favorite class), and was extremely grumpy.

Note the commas that surround the element in parentheses.

**2. Use parentheses to set off the numbers in a numbered list.**

The three most impressive things about geese are that (1) they love blueberries, (2) they are capable of swimming in 40-foot deep water at just a day old, and (3) they have only ten different vocalizations.

**3. Use parentheses to set off a parenthetical citation within a paragraph.**

"Parentheses can also be used with citations" (Turabian 2010, 303)

**4. Use brackets to indicate changes made to quoted material.**

"Brackets are most often used in quotations, to indicate changes [the writer has] made to a quoted passage" (Turabian 2010, 303).

**5. Use brackets to enclose a second layer of parenthetical material.**

Brackets, (her favorite punctuation marks [because of their boxy beauty]), are not used very often in common writing.

## 10. ELLIPSES

**6. Use ellipses to indicate a pause in thought.**

I thought that the wind had stopped...it still knocked me over.

I didn't have that much homework to finish...excluding that which was due last week.

**7. Use ellipses to represent passage of excluded words in a quote.**

"Strings of periods...can be used in quotations...where they are called ellipses" (Turabian 2010, 294).