

The Punctuation Game

Commas, Semicolons, Colons, and Dashes Edition

Punctuation marks make your writing easier to understand. They structure sentences by grouping or separating words. Here's a brief guide on the use of commas, semicolons, colons and dashes to help you clearly state your amazing ideas.



Commas



- Before a coordinating conjunction to join independent clauses (and, for, so, nor, but, or, yet)
The song is upbeat, yet its lyrics describe the saddest moments in a person's life.
- Between coordinate adjectives, that is those that modify separately the same word
Listeners raved about the songwriter's unapologetic, witty style.
- To set off parenthetical comments
Charlotte Brontë's pseudonym, for example, was Currer Bell.
- After a long introductory phrase or clause
After years of intense scrutiny from popular media outlets, she retired for good from the public eye.
- To separate words, phrases, and clauses in a series
Due to the pandemic, thousands of people died, many lost their jobs, and businesses had to close down.
- With non-restrictive modifiers, these are groups of words that can be removed without changing the central idea of a sentence
Madame Bovary, Flaubert's masterpiece, is a seminal work of literary realism.

Semicolons



- Joining independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction
Don't go outside; it's raining.
- Between items in a series that contain commas
Present at tonight's show will be rock musicians, like Stevie Nicks; popstars, like Olivia Rodrigo; and rappers, like Doja Cat.
- When the verb is omitted by a comma
Charlotte Brontë's pseudonym was Currer Bell; Anne's, Acton Bell; and Emily's, Ellis Bell.
- To replace a period between related sentences that are joined by conjunctive adverbs transitional phrases (for example, for instance, that is, besides, accordingly, furthermore, otherwise, however, thus, therefore)
When Madame Bovary was first published it was put on trial for offending public morality; however, after acquittal, it sold 15,000 copies in two months.

Colons



- Joining independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction
Don't go outside: it's raining.
- To introduce an elaboration
The film is based on the incomplete manuscript of the novel by the same name: the writer died before she could finish it.
- To introduce a principle or rule
The plot is structured similarly to Newton's first law of motion: an object will not change its motion unless a force acts on it.
- To introduce a list, do not use a colon if the list is introduced by a verb
The class will study some of Virginia Woolf's novels: Mrs. Dalloway, The Lighthouse, and Orlando.

Dashes



Also known as the em-dash, that is a dash the length of the letter m (—). Remember no space comes before or after the dash.

- Like a parentheses
Even after receiving a replacement—which took about two months to arrive—the computer was still faulty and impossible to use.
- To introduce an elaboration with the words: for example, namely, that is
Her novel was published posthumously—that is, her brother submitted the manuscript to the publishing company three years after her death.
- To introduce a list
The class will study some of Virginia Woolf's novels—Mrs. Dalloway, The Lighthouse, and Orlando.
- To prevent misreading for phrases that would be confusing to set off with commas
The romantic hero's qualities—at odds with society, brooding, wanderer—were developed by writers like Byron and Keats.

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