**Period**

A *period* is used to end a sentence. It is also used after initials, after abbreviations, and as a decimal point.

**At the End of a Sentence**
Use a period to end a sentence that makes a statement, a command, or a request.

- Taro won the fishing contest. (statement)
- Take his picture. (command)
- Please pass the bait. (request)

**After an Initial**
Place a period after an initial in a person’s name.

Susan B. Anthony        A. A. Milne

**As a Decimal**
Use a period as a decimal point and to separate dollars and cents.

Robert is 99.9 percent sure that the bus pass costs $2.50.

**After Abbreviations**
Use a period after each part of an abbreviation.

Mr.    Mrs.    Ms.    B.C.    A.D.
Jr.    Dr.    Ph.D.    U.S.A.

**After Final Abbreviations**
Use only one period when abbreviation is the last word in a sentence.

When Josie is nervous, she whistles, wiggles, winks, etc.

**Comma**

Commas are used to keep words and ideas from running together. They tell readers where to pause when reading.

**Between Items in a Series**
Place commas between words, phrases, or clauses in a series. (A series is three items or more in a row.)

- I like pepperoni, onions, and olives on pizza. (words)
- During the summer I read mysteries, ride my bike, and play basketball. (phrases)

**In Dates and Addresses**
Use commas to separate items in addresses and dates.

Our picnic is July 4, 2009, at Montrose Beach.
Mia’s address is 344 First Street, Atlanta, GA 30200.

Tip: Do not use a comma between the state and ZIP code.

**To Keep Numbers Clear**
Place commas between hundreds, thousands, millions, and so on. (Commas are not used in years: 1776, 1999, 2010.)

Rodney’s car has 200,000 miles on it. He’s trying to sell it for $1,500.

**To Set Of Interruptions**
Use commas to set off a word, phrase, or clause that interrupts the main thought of a sentence.

As it turned out, however, Rodney sold the car for $1,000.

**To Set Off Dialogue**
Set off the exact words of the speaker from the rest of the sentence with a comma.

Talia said, “I missed my favorite show last night.”

**In Direct Address**
Use commas to separate a noun of direct address (the person being spoken to) from the rest of the sentence.

Please, Carla, find some new jokes.

**Between Two Independent Clauses**
Use a comma between two independent clauses that are joined by coordinating conjunctions and, but, or, nor, for, so, and yet.

The aquarium workers rehabilitated the sick sea lion pups, and then they released them.

**In Letter Writing**
Place a comma after the salutation, or greeting, in a friendly letter and after the closing in all letters.

Dear Uncle Jim, (greeting)
Sincerely, (closing)

**To Set Off Appositives**
Use commas to set off appositives. An *appositive* is a word or phrase that renames the word before it. 

    My Father, a great cook, makes the best egg rolls in town. (an appositive phrase)

*To Set Off Interjections*

Use a comma to separate an interjection or a weak exclamation from the rest of the sentence.

    Wow, look at that sunrise!
    Hey, we’re up early!

*To Separate Adjectives*

Use commas to separate two or more adjectives that equally modify a noun.

    I like the feel of cold, salty water when I go wading.

**Tip:** Use these tests to see if adjectives modify equally:
* Switch the order of the adjectives; if the sentence is still clear, the adjectives modify equally.
* Insert *and* between the adjectives; if the sentence reads well, use a comma when *and* is omitted.

*To Set Off Introductory Phrases and Clauses*

Use a comma to separate a long phrase or clause that comes before the main part of the sentence.

    After checking my knee pads, I started off. (phrase)
    If you practice often, skating is easy. (clause)

**Semicolon**

The semicolon is sometimes used in place of a period; other times, it works like a comma.

To Join Two Independent Clauses

Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses when there is no coordinating conjunction between them.

    My aunt has a motorboat; I wish I could drive it.
    We go fishing in it; however, I still don’t get to drive it.

**Tip:** Independent clauses can stand alone as separate sentences.

To Separate Groups of Words That Contain Commas

Use a semicolon to separate a series of phrases that already contain commas.

    We crossed the stream; unpacked our lunches, cameras, and journals; and took time to rest.

**Note:** The second phrase contains commas.

**Colon**

A colon is used to introduce a list or draw attention to information that follows. Colons are also used in business letters and between numbers expressing time.

    After a Salutation
    Place a colon after the salutation of a business letter.
    Dear Ms. Koplin:
    Dear Chairperson:

To Introduce a List

Use a colon to introduce a list following a sentence.

    Snorkelers need the right equipment: fins, masks, and life belts.

When introducing a list, the colon often comes after summary words like *the following* or *these things.*

    Scuba divers often see the following: barracuda, eels, turtles, and jellyfish.

**Tip:** It is *incorrect* to use a colon after a verb.

    My favorite salad toppings include: bacon, raisins, sunflower seeds, croutons. (The colon is incorrectly used after the verb *include.*)

Between Numbers in Time

Place a colon between the parts of a number indicating time.

    The race begins at 1:30 p.m.
    I’ll meet you at 12:00 noon.

**Hyphen**

A hyphen is used to divide a word at the end of a line. Hyphens are also used to join or create new words.

To Divide a Word

Use a hyphen to divide a word when you run out of room at the end of a line. Divide words only between syllables. (The word *en-vi-ra-nent* can be divided in three places.)

    John Masterson showed concern for the environment by participating in Earth Day activities.

**Tip:** Here are other guidelines for hyphenating words:
* Never divide a one-syllable word: showed, great.
* Never divide a one-letter syllable from the rest of the word: l-ident-y.
* Never divide contractions: haven’t, shouldn’t.

In Compound Words

Use a hyphen in certain compound words.

    well-done     baby-sitter     off-key

Between Numbers in Fractions

Use a hyphen between the numbers in a fraction.

    One-Fourth of the group gobbled seven-eighths of the cake!
To Form an Adjective
Use a hyphen to join two or more words that work together to form a single adjective before a noun.
blue-green sea sister-proof closet

To Join Letters and Words
Use a hyphen to join a letter to a word.
T-shirt T-ball X-ray e-mail U-turn

Dash
A dash is used to show a break in a sentence, to emphasize certain words, or to show that a speaker has been interrupted.

In a Sentence Break
Use a dash to show a sudden break in a sentence.
The skateboard—if you didn’t notice—has a wheel missing.

For Emphasis
Use a dash to emphasize a word, a series of words, a phrase, or a clause.
You can learn about many subjects—customs, careers, sports, weather—on the Internet.

In Interrupted Speech
Use a dash to show that someone’s speech is being interrupted by another person.
Well, hello—yes, I—that’s right—yes, I—sure, I’d love to—I’ll be there!

Apostrophe
An apostrophe is used to form plurals, to form contractions, to show omitted letters or numbers, or to show possession.

In Contractions
Use an apostrophe to show that one or more letters have been left out to form a contraction.
didn’t (did not) I’ll (I will)

To Form Plurals
Use an apostrophe and s to form the plural of a letter, a number, or a sign.
A’s (letter) 8’s (number) +’s (sign)

In Place of Omitted Numbers or Letters
Use an apostrophe to show that one or more letters or numbers have been left out.
Class of ’05 (20 is left out) fixin’ to go (g is left out)

To Form Singular Possessives
Add an apostrophe and s to make the possessive form of most singular nouns.
My sister’s hobby is jazz dancing.

When a singular noun ends with an s or z sound, you may form the possessive by adding just an apostrophe.
Lucas’ hobby is collecting pencil stubs.

Except: when a singular noun is a one-syllable word, add both an apostrophe and an s.
Gus’s father took him fishing.

To Form Shared Possessives
When possession is shared by more than one noun, add an apostrophe and s to the last noun.
Jim, Jeb, and Jerry’s fish.

To Form Plural Possessives
Add just an apostrophe to make the possessive form of plural nouns ending in s.
the girls’ logrolling team

For the plural nouns not ending in s, add an apostrophe and s.
children’s book

Exclamation Point
An exclamation point is used to express strong feeling. It may be placed after a word, a phrase, or a sentence.

Surprise! (word)
Happy Birthday! (phrase)
Wait for me! (sentence)

Tip: Never use double exclamation points in school writing assignments or in business letters.

Question Mark
A question mark is used after a direct question and to show doubt about the correctness of something.

After a Direct Quotation
Place a question mark at the end of a direct question.
Do you want to visit other galaxies?

To Show Doubt
Place a question mark in parenthesis to show that you are unsure a fact is correct.
The ship arrived in Boston harbor on July 23(?), 1652.
Parentheses

Parentheses are used around words included in a sentence to add information or to make an idea clearer.

To Add Information
Use parentheses to add information.

The map (figure 2) will show you the route to follow to your destination.

To Make an Idea Clear
Use parentheses to make an idea clearer.

Five of the students provided background music (humming very quietly) for the vocalist.

Italics and Underlining

Italics is a printer’s term to type that is slightly slanted. Italics is used for titles and special words. (In handwritten material, each word or letter that should be in italics is underlined. On a computer, use italics.)

For Titles
Use Italics (or underlining) for titles of plays, books, newspapers, magazines, television programs, movies (videos), record albums (cassettes and CD’s), and other complete works.

The Wiz OR The Wiz (play)
Exploring an Ocean Tide Pool (book)
Pinky and the Brain (television program)
The Prince of Egypt (movie)

For Special Words
Use italics (or underlining) for names of aircraft and ships.

Columbia OR Columbia (spacecraft)
Merrimac (Civil War ship)

Use italics (or underlining) to indicate foreign words.

E pluribus unum, meaning “one our of many,” is written on many U.S. coins.

Use italics (or underlining) to indicate words discussed as words, rather than for their meaning.

The word freedom means different things to different people.

Quotation Marks

Quotation marks are used to enclose the exact words of the speaker, to show that words are used in a special way, and to punctuate titles.

To Set Off Direct Quotations
Place quotation marks before and after the spoken words.

“Patrick Henry is an American hero,” the teacher said.

Placement of Punctuation
Put periods and commas inside quotation marks.

Troy said, “Let’s make tuna sandwiches.”
“Sounds good,” said Rich.

Place quotation marks or exclamation points inside the quotation marks when they punctuate the quotation; place them outside when they punctuate the main sentence.

“Will we have tuna and apples?” asked Troy.
“Yes!” replied Rich.

Did you hear Mom say, “We’re out of pickles”?

For Special Words
Quotation marks may be used to set apart a word that is being discussed.

The word “scrumptious” is hard to spell.

To Punctuate Titles
Place quotation marks around titles of songs, poems, short stories, essays, and chapters of books. Also use quotation marks with articles found in magazines, newspapers, encyclopedias, or electronic sources. (SEE “Italics and Underlining.”)

“America the Beautiful” (song)
“McBroom Tells the Truth” (short story)
“Water, Water Everywhere” (chapter)

Tip: When you write a title, capitalize the first word, last word, and every word in between except for articles (a, an, the), short prepositions (by, for, with), and coordinating conjunctions (and, or, but).