

## Punctuation: Comma

Lecture taken from *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Lynn Truss & from *Handbook of Current English* by P. G. Perrin, J. W. Corder, & G. H. Smith

## Panda Story

- A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air.
- “Why?” asks the confused waiter, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tossed it over his shoulder.

## Panda Story - 2

- “I’ m a panda,” he says, at the door. “Look it up.”
- The waiter turns to the relevant entry and, sure enough, finds an explanation.
- “**Panda**. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves.

## Reasons for Punctuation

- To clarify the syntax of a sentence
- To communicate rhythm, flow or pitch
- Commas often indicate a short pause
- Use of comma can change meaning

## Commas Can Change Meaning

- Verily, I say unto thee, This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.
- Verily I say unto thee this day, thou shalt be with me in Paradise.
  - From an 1818 text on punctuation

## Use commas

- In lists
  - It was left to the House of Representatives to decide whether the Presidency should go to Jackson, Adams, or Crawford.
    - Note: No colon
- No comma when *and* or *or* cannot be inserted between adjectives
  - He spoke longingly of the good old prewar days.

## Use commas - 2

- With direct quotations
  - “Only a fool,” Sherman said, “would carry on like that.”
  - Sherman said, “Only a fool would carry on like that.”
- Omit commas with very short quotations.
  - Father always said “Time is money.”

## Use Commas - 3

- To join two sentences with a conjunction (*and*, *but*)
  - The boys wanted to stay up until midnight, but they grew tired and fell asleep.
- To join two sentences without a conjunction, use a semicolon.
  - Jim woke up in his own bed; however, he felt great.

## Use Commas – 4

- To disambiguate the syntax of *garden path* sentences
  - As far as I can see the results have not been promising.
  - When the rains are over the fields are plowed in preparation for planting.

## Use Commas - 5

- In nonrestrictive (nondefining) clauses
  - Last night’s audience, which contained a large number of college students, applauded each number enthusiastically.
  - Vasari’s history, hovering between fact and fiction, is not a reliable source of data.
  - Nonrestrictive clauses can be deleted without changing the meaning.
- No commas with restrictive (defining) clauses
  - Men who drive dangerously should lose their driver’s licence. (Restrictive)
  - Men, who drive dangerously, should lose their driver’s licence. (Nonrestrictive)

## Use Commas to Clarify Meaning

- Leonora walked on her head a little higher than usual.
  - How does one walk on one's head?
- The driver managed to escape from the vehicle before it sank and swam to the river bank.
  - Who or what swam to the river bank?
- The convict said the judge is mad.
- The convict, said the judge, is mad.

## Punctuation - Apostrophe

- Apostrophe indicates possession
  - Mary's book, the children's books
  - Charles' book (or Charles's)
  - The student's assignment vs. the students' assignments.
- Do not use an apostrophe to indicate plural: 1960s
- Apostrophes are used in contractions
  - It's = it is    *It's* does not indicate possessive.
  - Can not = can't
  - They are = they're (Compare *there*, *their*)
- *Its* – indicates possession.
  - The dog chased its tail.

## Punctuation – Semicolons

- Use a semicolon (NOT A COMMA) to connect two closely related sentences.
  - He took a couple of steps, stopped, reached out and turned a valve; as he did so, he told us the valves had to be checked daily.
- Use a comma before *but* when it connects two sentences.
  - It is an imperfect system, but it is better than none.

## Semicolon - 2

- Use a semicolon or period when two sentences are connected by *however*, *consequently*, *etc.*
  - I planned to go to the movie at nine o' clock; however, I fell asleep at eight.

## Punctuation – Hyphens

- When two or more words act together as a modifier before a noun, the two words are connected by a hyphen.
  - Two-minute penalty
  - Nineteenth-century poet
  - Client-centered therapy
  - Short-term memory; long-term memory
  - Four-minute mile
  - He ran the mile in four minutes. (No hyphen)

## Punctuation - Colons

- If you use a colon to introduce a list, the colon must follow a complete sentence.
  - In APA format there are four main sections to a report on an experiment: the introduction, the method (which includes a description of the design, the procedure and the participants), the results (which include relevant statistics), and the discussion.
- Note the use of parenthetical expressions.
  - The sentence must make sense without the PEs



## Colons - 2

- Alternative punctuation:
  - In APA format there are four main sections to a report on an experiment: the introduction; the method which includes a description of the design, the procedure and the participants; the results section which includes statistics; and the discussion.
- The use of parentheses indicate that the material in parentheses is of secondary interest.

## Colons - 3

- Do not use a colon between the subject and predicate of a sentence, or between the preposition and its objects.
  - According to APA format, in the method section of a research report you must describe the participants and how they were recruited, the sequence of events that a participant experiences, the independent and dependent variables, the experimental design, and a any stimulus materials used.
  - Note: No punctuation after *describe*.
  - If the elements of the list contain commas, separate the elements by semicolons.

## Colons - 4

- A colon can be used to introduce a quotation. She reminded him of the words of Pope:  
“Most women have no characters at all.”
  - Note that the colon follows a complete sentence. If the quote is part of the sentence, use a comma before the quote.

## Punctuation - Slash

- A slash (/) is not a punctuation mark. Do not use it in formal writing. Use the word *and* or *or* as appropriate, or delete one of the two words connected by the slash.
  - ...stories read by parents/teachers. X
  - ... stories read by parents and/or teachers. X
  - ...stories read by parents or teachers.

## Hyphens - 2

- Punctuate: One eyed one horned flying purple people eater
  - What does the creature eat?
- Some words are hyphenated. Check a dictionary if you are unsure about hyphenation.

## Hyphens - 3

- Do not use a hyphen to mean *to*.
  - There were 10-12 participants per group. X
  - There were ten to 12 participants per group.
  - There were between ten and 12 participants per group.

## Punctuation – Dashes

- A dash (typed as 2 hyphens) marks a sudden turn in the direction of thought.
  - He praised Ann’ s intelligence, her efficiency, her good taste—and then the proposed to her sister.

## Dashes - 2

- A dash can be used in place of parentheses. (See Slide # 16)The dash means that the material between the dashes is important.
  - Every use of the past tense—”I was there. He did it.”--is a bit of history.
  - With our love of record keeping—doubtless a mark of our business society—the origin of almost everything is known or easily discoverable.

