

PUNCTUATION RULES--Lasley

Careful punctuation eases communication; careless punctuation hinders it. Here are some of the most basic rules of punctuation:

COMMA

In a series, use a comma before and:

The pen, the pencil, and the typewriter failed her.

Use a comma to separate a direct quotation from its attribution:

"We are not amused," said Queen Victoria.

Use a comma before conjunctions when connecting two independent clauses:

The pollsters predicted a close election, but the smart money knew otherwise.

Beware the comma splice, that is, joining independent clauses solely by means of a comma (not using a coordinating conjunction—FANBOYS):

Lasley's work is tedious, I had to read every paragraph several times.

(This is incorrect—use a coordinating conjunction after the comma OR separate with a semicolon.)

DO NOT use a comma simply because you see an "and" in the sentence. There must be two independent clauses on either side of it.

Mom made me go to the market to buy bread and to the pharmacy to buy vitamins.

Use a comma to set off a phrase or dependent clause that comes before the main clause in a sentence, however, do NOT use a comma if the dependent clause comes last:

After swimming fifty laps, I dried my hair.

I dried my hair after swimming fifty laps.

Use a comma to set off a word, phrase, or clause that provides only parenthetical, incidental information.

Harry's wife, Joan, was named Mother of the Year.

(Harry has only one wife, and her name is not essential for understanding.)

Do not use a comma to set off a word, phrase, or clause that provides essential information.

Henry's brother Jack is a pain in the neck.

(Henry has two brothers.)

SEMICOLON

Use a semicolon when you want to indicate a close connection between independent clauses that are NOT connected by a coordinating conjunction:

The pollsters predicted a close election; the smart money knew otherwise.

A semicolon is particularly effective when the independent clauses suggest a clash of contrasts:

We guarantee nothing; however, we try to please.

Use a semicolon to distinguish items in a series that contains internal commas:

Monique found three curious items in her grandmother's hope chest: a white silk dress, still wrapped in the tissue in which it was bought; a pair of dancing slippers, seemingly made of glass; and a jeweled tiara, covered with hundreds of fake diamonds.

COLON

Use a colon to direct attention to an explanation, a summary, a series, or a quotation that follows (NOTE: colons must be preceded by a complete sentence):

Jealousy serves only one purpose for man: it alienates him from that which he would most dearly cling.

There are three flights daily from Las Vegas to San Diego: the 8:30 a.m., the 11:30 a.m., and the 5:30 p.m.

DASH

Use the dash—sparingly—to indicate interruptions, informal breaks in construction, parenthetical remarks, and points of special emphasis:

Muhammad Ali—then known as Cassius Clay—won an Olympic Gold Medal in 1960.

Locked in the tower, isolated from her friends and family, forgotten by her tormentors—Mary cried.

QUOTATION MARKS

Use quotation marks to enclose quoted material, title of essays, articles, short stories, chapters, paintings, and short musical compositions. Underline (or use italics) for the titles of books, periodicals, newspapers, movies, television programs, plays, and lengthy musical compositions. Place periods and commas inside quotation marks; place colons and semicolons outside quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation points are placed inside or outside quotation marks depending on whether they apply to the quotation only or to the whole sentence:

He said, "Who am I?"

Did he say, "I am Santa Clause"?

HYPHEN

Use a hyphen to attach certain prefixes to root words, to tie together compound adjectives, to join some—but not all—compound nouns:

All-knowing; a would-be-philosopher; a philosopher-poet.

(When in doubt about hyphens, consult your dictionary.)

ELLIPSIS

Use three spaced dots when you omit material from a quoted sentence. Use four spaced dots when the omitted material includes a period (at the end of a sentence, usually).

RPDP Secondary Literacy
Lasley