

# Nuts and Bolts Punctuation

ACES 2012 – New Orleans

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## Are these sentences properly punctuated?

1. Carlas book is on the desk.
2. The Santamarias live on St. Clair Street. Their house is next to the Changs.
3. Your going to love learning about punctuation.
4. It's a great day for grammar!
5. The new park is a great place for mom's and dad's to take the kids.
6. There's a do's and don'ts box with this Valentines Day story.
7. Ed edits mainly books, Winnie edits for a magazine.
8. The company has offices in Chicago, Dallas, Wichita, Kan., Lincoln, Neb., and Peoria, Ill.
9. She sang about her favorite things; raindrops, kittens, kettles and death metal.
10. President Obama said he was "happy" to be visiting the troops in Afghanistan.
11. Oblomov, who avoids work whenever possible, it's like he's allergic to it, can usually be found on the couch.
12. Robert Weinstein, an infectious disease expert at Cook County's Stroger Hospital in Chicago, said...
13. About 1,500 people turned out for an anti-gang violence walk on Saturday.
14. Putting more fuel-efficient cars on the road is one of the goals.
15. Certification requires a three to six-month course of study followed by a practicum.
16. She likes her naive sweet roommate best.
17. They all live in a big white house on Elm.
18. To my parents, John F. Kennedy and Gloria Steinem.
19. Ian McEwan's book, "Solar," follows the life of a Nobel Prize-winning scientist.
20. His only brother Tony lives in New Mexico.
21. The parents of the girls, and their 7-year-old sister, are divorced and share custody.
22. She wanted to give us detailed directions however we wanted to go.
23. Fred someone's pet skunk is loose in the hotel.
24. The varsity team wanted to eat before the bus ride, the JV team wanted to wait until they got home.

## Answers:

1. Carla's book is on the desk.
2. The Santamarias live on St. Clair Street. Their house is next to the Changs'.
3. You're going to love learning about punctuation.
4. It's a great day for grammar.
5. The new park is a great place for moms and dads to take the kids.
6. There's a dos and don'ts (or *do's and don't's*) box with this Valentine's Day story.
7. Ed edits mainly books; (or . or , *and*) Winnie edits for a magazine.
8. The company has offices in Chicago; Dallas; Wichita, Kan.; Lincoln, Neb.; and Peoria, Ill.
9. She sang about her favorite things: raindrops, kittens, kettles and death metal.
10. President Obama said he was happy to be visiting the troops in Afghanistan.
11. Oblomov, who avoids work whenever possible — it's like he's allergic to it — can usually be found on the couch.
12. Robert Weinstein, an infectious-disease expert at Cook County's Stroger Hospital in Chicago, said...
13. About 1,500 people turned out for an anti-gang-violence walk on Saturday.
14. Putting more fuel-efficient cars (or *more-fuel-efficient*, depending on meaning) on the road is one of the goals.
15. Certification requires a three- to six-month course (or *three-to-six-month*) of study followed by a practicum.
16. She likes her naïve, sweet roommate best.
17. They all live in a big white house on Elm.
18. To my parents, John F. Kennedy, and Gloria Steinem.
19. Ian McEwan's book "Solar" follows the life of a Nobel Prize-winning scientist.
20. His only brother, Tony, lives in New Mexico.
21. The parents of the girls and their 7-year-old sister are divorced and share custody.
22. She wanted to give us detailed directions; however, we wanted to go. (or OK as is if you mean she could guide you for any route you choose)
23. Fred, someone's pet skunk is loose in the hotel. (or *Fred, someone's pet skunk*, if Fred is the name of the skunk)
24. The varsity team wanted to eat before the bus ride; the JV team wanted to wait until they got home.

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## Apostrophes

- Apostrophes are used for personal possessives: *Jan's book, Carl's dog, the scientists' idea*
- Apostrophes are used for contractions: *I'm leaving, he's happy, we're on our way*
- **NO** apostrophes for plurals: *tacos, professors, moms and dads*
- **NO** apostrophes for possessive pronouns: *your book, their house, its place*

**Tip:** When you have a word like you're or it's, read it as two words – you are, it is – and if the sentence still makes sense, you have the right word. *Did you send the package? It's (it is) on its way.*

- Two weeks' notice, three years' experience

**Tip:** notice **of** two weeks, experience **of** three years – use an apostrophe.

- Seven months pregnant – no apostrophe (you don't say "pregnant of seven months).

## Semicolons

- Use a semicolon to separate two independent but related clauses and avoid a comma splice:  
*Curt went to KU; Katy went to K-State.*
- Do not use a semicolon if you have a conjunction:  
*Curt went to KU **and** Katy went to K-State.*
- Use a semicolon to separate comma-containing elements in a list (especially useful for cutlines):  
*From left, Karl Swartz of Morris, Laing, Evans, Brock & Kennedy; Lathi de Silva of Sullivan, Higdon & Sink; and Jeff Ronen of Kanza Bank visit at a Wichita Metro Chamber of Commerce mixer.*

## Colons

- A colon signals a major break in a sentence.
- Material after a colon may be either a complete sentence or a fragment.
- A colon can introduce a list, an elaboration or examples.
- Formal letter salutations end with a colon:  
*To the Editors:*
- Colons go outside quotation marks:  
*Some big stars and familiar faces can be seen in "Sherlock Holmes":*

## Quotation marks

- Quotation marks set off directly quoted material.
- They should **not** be used simply to indicate emphasis.
- If you're using quoted material, use more than one word, or simply paraphrase, to avoid "scare" quotes or "air" quotes.

## Dashes

- Em or en is a matter of style; where to use dashes is slightly more clear-cut.
- Use a pair of dashes to set off extra descriptive material or a comment or aside within a sentence. Dashes are particularly useful if that extra material contains commas of its own or needs more separation.
- Dashes can also signify a sudden turn in the sentence, or a special emphasis on something at the end:  
*He'd never seen footprints like this – seven distinct toes.*
- Don't overuse dashes. Lots of times commas will do to set something off.

## Exclamation points

- For news and nonfiction, don't.
- If you must use one, use only one (don't double them up) and make sure it's appropriate.

## Hyphens

- Hyphens are the subject of much debate, because editors disagree on when they're necessary.
- Let clarity be your ultimate guide. And be consistent.
- Use a hyphen to connect some compound words. Consult your dictionary/stylebook.
- Prefixes are frequently hyphenated; again, consult your dictionary/stylebook.
- Use a hyphen sometimes to connect two or more words that modify another word, **if clarity is an issue**:  
*We ordered 5-foot-long subs, or We ordered 5 foot-long subs?*

**Tip:** If the two modifying words are different parts of speech, they probably need a hyphen:

*mixed-up world, frost-free refrigerator, sit-in protest, grass-fed cattle.*

- If each word modifies the next, no hyphen is necessary: *oddly shaped room.*
- Suspensive hyphenation: When you want to get rid of a word to tighten up a sentence with two repetitive hyphenated constructions, you can drop the first instance of the repeated word, but leave the hyphen:  
*InterCall, a global voice- and video-conferencing operation.*

## Commas

Commas signal a pause or a dividing line in writing. Problems arise because there are places you must have a comma, places you shouldn't have a comma, and places where it's your choice. Let clarity guide.

- When a sentence contains a series of words, you usually need commas.

**Tip:** If you can put "and" between the adjectives, or if you can reverse them and they still make sense, use a comma.

- Serial/Oxford comma: This is the comma after the second-to-last item in a list. AP says not to use it *unless needed for clarity.*
- If you stumble over wording, or think a reader will, put a comma in.
- An essential clause is one that is crucial to the meaning of the sentence, serving to distinguish an element of the sentence from a larger group.
- The students who studied passed the quiz. → *Only those who studied passed.*
- The students, who studied, passed the quiz. → *They all studied, and they all passed.*
- Appositives are nonessential clauses that simply give more information about a noun. Appositives are set off with commas: one before and one after.
- States, dates, ages, etc. fall under this category. Don't forget the second comma: The Wichita, Kansas, native ...
- Conjunctions: Use a comma after a coordinating conjunction if the subject is repeated:  
*We love hyphens but hate commas. We love hyphens, but we hate commas.*
- Set conjunctive adverbs (however, moreover, etc.) off with a comma (or two):  
*Moreover, we decided to eat the eels. Emma, nevertheless, sold the house. She said she would; indeed, she did.*
- Direct address: Use a comma to set off a person being addressed from the rest of the sentence, regardless of where the person's name is in the sentence: *Let's eat, kids! Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.*
- Comma splice: when two independent clauses are joined by a comma instead of a semicolon, period or conjunction.

**Tip:** How to tell if you have a comma splice. If you can put a period where the comma is and it makes sense, you shouldn't have a comma there. Fix a comma splice by swapping the comma for a semicolon or conjunction.

- Job titles: offset a title with commas if a title comes after a name; offset a name if a title precedes the name and there's more than one; no commas if the title precedes the name and there's only one.
- Don't put a comma after "titled" or "called" and before the title.
- Use a comma to set off a direct quote, but not an indirect quote.
- Don't put a single comma between the subject and predicate unless needed for clarity: "What she said, was..."
- Using a comma with "too" is up to you. If you want emphasis, use a comma.

**Tip:** Be aware of how grammatically correct commas can change meaning:

- Opponents of the death penalty note that capital punishment cases cost about \$500,000, or 75 percent more, to prosecute. **WRONG** – *death penalty cases don't cost \$500,000 to prosecute, they cost \$500,000 MORE*
- Opponents of the death penalty note that capital punishment cases cost about \$500,000, or 75 percent, more to prosecute. **RIGHT**