

## Handy Punctuation Reference

This handout presents some—but not all—of the rules.

<b>Period</b>	
Rule	Example
At the end of sentences	<i>John has the measles.</i>
After initials and abbreviations	<i>Dr. Jones., Ph.D.</i>
· After numbers and as a decimal point	<i>1., 2., 3., ... .5, 1.5</i>
<b>Question Mark</b>	
Rule	Example
At the end of direct questions	<i>What is he doing?</i>
But NOT after indirect questions	<i>He asked what it was.</i>
<b>Exclamation Point</b>	
Rule	Example
After emphatic statements	<i>Help! Be careful!</i>
<b>Comma</b>	
Rule	Example
To separate two main clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions: ( <i>for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so</i> )	<i>We rushed to the station, but the train had already left.</i>
To separate a dependent clause from a main clause when the dependent clause precedes the main clause. Note: There is no comma when the clause order is reversed.	<i>If it is a nice day on Saturday, I will go to the football game.</i>  <i>I will go to the football game if it is a nice day on Saturday.</i>
To set off interrupting statements	<i>I know, of course, that you are studying. He is, I believe, the worst player on the team.</i>
To set off clauses beginning with <i>who, whom, or which</i> (relative clauses) when they are not absolutely necessary to identify or specify a particular person or thing. Note: Clauses which begin with the word <b>that</b> usually are essential in identifying such person or things; therefore they are not usually set off by commas.	<i>Mr. Jones, who lives on Market Street, crashed into a telephone pole while driving 90 miles per hour.</i>  <i>The car that he was driving before the accident was demolished.</i>

<b>Comma (continued)</b>	
<b>Rule</b>	<b>Example</b>
To set off an unnecessary restatement of someone's name (an appositive).	<i>Mr. Smith, my father, is the man wearing the hat.</i>
After introductory words such as <i>yes, no, first, second, however,</i> and so on.	<i>Yes, I'd like to go.</i>
To set off nouns in direct address.	<i>Mrs. Smith, have you visited the art museum? Have you heard, class, that the assignment is easy?</i>
In direct quotations	<i>"I understand," he said, "that you intend to go to France."</i>
In dates, between the day and the year	<i>November 1, 1985</i>
Between cities and states	<i>He lives in Wilmington, Delaware</i>
To separate words in a series	<i>I want milk, bread, butter, and cheese. He hoped that the war would end, that the crime rate would drop, and that his personal problems would be solved.</i>
<b>Apostrophe</b>	
<b>Rule</b>	<b>Example</b>
Omission of letters, as in contractions	<i>He's (he is), don't (do not), we're (we are), it's (it is)</i>
To show plurals of letter and numbers (or omission of numbers) or words used as words	<i>3's; blizzard of '89, cross your t's and dot your i's around here</i>
To show that a word is given a loose, or colloquial, pronunciation	<i>"None o' the boys is goin' t' be sick," he said.</i>
When no confusion results, use either 's or s to form plurals such as the following:	<i>Count to 10,000 by 2's (or by 2s). 1900's or 1900s.</i>
To show singular possession: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Add 's to singular nouns</li> <li>2. Add 's to indefinite pronouns (anybody, somebody, everyone)</li> <li>3. Add ' to proper singular nouns ending in s</li> <li>4. Add 's to only the last word in singular compound nouns</li> </ol>	<b>Examples:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Harry's book, sisters's boyfriend</i></li> <li>2. <i>Anybody's lesson, somebody's car, everyone's feelings</i></li> <li>3. <i>Keats' poem, Ms. Evans' house</i></li> <li>4. <i>Her mother-in-law's hats</i></li> </ol>

<b>Apostrophe (continued)</b>	
<b>Rule</b>	<b>Example</b>
<p>To show plural possession:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Add only the ' to plural nouns ending in s</li> <li>2. Add 's to plural nouns not ending in s</li> <li>3. Add ' only to the last word in plural compound nouns that end in s</li> </ol> <p>Note: For plural compound nouns, add 's to the last word of the compound noun.</p>	<p><i>Examples:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The girls' coats, the boys' shoes</i></li> <li>2. <i>The men's hate, the children's toys</i></li> <li>3. <i>The Dean of Students' Office, the Vice President of Legal Affairs' speech</i></li> </ol> <p><i>Mother-in-law's opinions, son-in-law's tricks.</i></p>
<p>To show other possession:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Add 's when indicating individual ownership or two or more individuals.</li> <li>2. Add ' only to the final name when indicating joint ownership.</li> <li>3. Use both <b>of</b> and ' to show possession among several of the same kind.</li> <li>4. Do not use ' with the possessive form of personal pronouns. The personal pronouns <i>his, hers, theirs, its, our, yours,</i> and the pronoun <i>whose</i> are possessives as they stand and do not require the apostrophe</li> <li>5. Do not confuse the possessive pronoun <i>whose</i> with the contraction <i>who's</i> (who is).</li> <li>6. Do not confuse the possessive pronoun <i>its</i> with the contraction <i>it's</i> (it is).</li> </ol>	<p><i>Examples:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Mary's and Jane's books, Jim's and Bob's houses</i></li> <li>2. <i>Mary and Jane's book</i> <i>Bill and Ted's adventure</i></li> <li>3. <i>An old hat of Tom's</i> <i>A new dress of Jane's</i></li> <li>4. <i>His father</i> <i>A book of hers</i> <i>A friend of theirs</i> <i>Its nest</i> <i>Our home</i> <i>The book of yours</i></li> <li>5. <i>Who's coming to dinner? Whose plate is this?</i></li> <li>6. <i>We know it's a robin. We couldn't find its nest.</i></li> </ol>
<b>Quotation Mark</b>	
<b>Rule</b>	<b>Example</b>
The exact words of a speaker	<i>"Let's go there next week," he said.</i>
An interrupted quotation	<i>"Okay," yelled the crook, "hands up!"</i>
Titles of poems, songs, stories, chapters, articles	<i>"Rip van Winkle"</i>
<b>Colon</b>	
<b>Rule</b>	<b>Example</b>
After the greeting on a business letter	<i>Dear Sir:</i>
To introduce a list	<i>The following items are needed:</i>

<b>Semicolon</b>	
Rule	Example
To separate two closely related independent clauses which do not have any other joining word	<i>One is small; the other is large.</i>
In compound sentences before such words as furthermore, however, nevertheless, therefore, consequently, and so on (transition words).	<i>Our plane was three hours late; consequently, we did not arrive on time.</i>
<b>Hyphen</b>	
Rule	Example
To express the idea of a unit	<i>I double-parked (verb). He owns a well-built house (adjective).</i>
To avoid ambiguity	<i>Re-sign the petition (compare to resign from office)</i>
If you must break the word at the end of a line, use a hyphen between syllables.	<i>In spite of the heat this summer, enthusiastic spectators flocked to games in droves.</i>
<b>Dash</b>	
Rule	Example
To show a sudden break in thought	<i>The sun <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>which is nearby<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>sn't that large.</i>
To show emphasis before an appositive	<i>Money, fame, power<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>none of these things are important without health.</i>
<b>Underlining</b>	
Rule	Example
Titles of magazines, newspapers, books, movies, and plays	<i>He likes to read <u>The New York Times</u>.</i>