

A Quick Reference Guide from Writing Support Services

<http://www.cuw.edu/Tools/resources/lrc/writingcenter/grammar.html>

Minor Punctuation Marks

Semicolons [;]

*** Semicolons separate closely related independent clauses. An independent clause is a complete thought which contains a subject and a verb and can stand on its own.**

I like to play many sports; volleyball is my favorite sport and the most enjoyable.

*** Semicolons are also used with conjunctive adverbs (however, moreover, nevertheless, consequently, as a result) to join two independent clauses.**

*Bill Monroe is deceased; however, he is still the father of Bluegrass.
The fire alarm is going off; therefore, a building is on fire.*

*** Colons are used to list. (A complete sentence must be used before the colon.)**

Incorrect - *The list is: coffee, eggs, bacon, sugar, and milk.*

Correct - *The following items were added to the list: coffee, eggs, bacon, sugar, and milk.*

*** Colons separate an independent clause from a quotation.**

Melissa often referred back to her favorite quotation from her mom: Eat all your food on your plate.?

*** A colon is used after a salutation in a business letter.**

*Dear Senator Rice:
It has come to our attention:*

*** To designate a speaker in a play or in a court testimony**

*Dave: The flower bloomed in the spring.
Mary: And it withered in the fall.*

Reminders

- * Do not use dashes to set apart material when commas would do the work.
- * There are no spaces between the dash and the letters on either side of it.
- * To achieve the dash I used above, you will have to type two hyphens; the appropriate dash will then appear as you continue typing.

Parentheses [()]

* To include material in a sentence that is not very important or wouldn't normally fit into the flow of the sentence.

Thirty-five years after his death, Robert Frost (not related to Frosty the snow man) remains America's favorite poet.

*** If the material in the parentheses appears within a sentence and is an incomplete sentence, do not use a capital letter or period to punctuate it; a question mark or exclamation mark may be more appropriate.**

Thirty-five years after his death, Robert Frost (know him?) remains America's favorite poet.

*** If the material in the parentheses is a separate sentence, punctuate it as one.**

Thirty-five years after his death, Robert Frost remains America's favorite poet. (We remember him at Kennedy's inauguration.)

Minor Punctuation Marks

Semicolons [;]

*** Semicolons are used to separate a monster list containing commas.**

I have friends from Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Fort Wayne, Indiana; New York, New York; and Detroit, Michigan.

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*** To designate a speaker in a play or in a court testimony**

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Dashes [--]

-The dash is a handy device, informal and essentially playful, telling you that you're about to take off on a different tack but still in some way connected with the present course only you have to remember that the dash is there, and either put a second dash at the end of the notion to let the reader know that he's back on course, or else end the sentence, as here, with a period.

*** A dash is used to set off parenthetical elements for emphasis or (if it contains commas) for clarity.**

All three of them Bob, Jenny, and Mary enjoy basketball.

The trail down the Grande Canyon steep, narrow, winding, and lacking guard rails is treacherous.

*** They mark sudden breaks in thought, abrupt change in tone.**

I know who she is, Mrs. Mrs. Mrs.-somebody-the mayor of Gilpin-or Springtown.

*** A dash occurs after an introductory list or series.**

Eager, determined to succeed, and scared to death—all of these describe my emotions the first day on the job.

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