

Punctuation: Writing's Traffic Cops!

Period (The stop sign)

A period ends a sentence. It isn't necessary to place a period after a statement contained in parenthesis when it is part of another sentence. *Jason decided the case would be submitted as indicated (indicated means substantial evidence of abuse exists) and submitted it to Childline.*
Three periods together, an ellipsis, is used to show omissions in a quote, or to indicate a pause.
Periods follow initials unless the abbreviation is an acronym. *Mr., Dr., Ms., A.M. as opposed to WAC (Women's Army Corp) or NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)*

Comma (Flashing yellow)

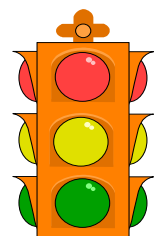
Comma comes from the Greek word, komma, meaning to cut or segment. It is the most frequently used punctuation in the English language. It is for that reason that the rules for comma use are so complex. We need to take note of a few common rules:

- ✓ Use commas after introductory elements. *Slowly, she began to catch on . . . or In fact, only one of them was . . . or Carrying a full water jug, John was able to . . .*
- ✓ Use commas to enclose an explanatory word or phrase. *Child Protective Service, or CPS, is generally known for it's response to a crisis.*
- ✓ Use commas to join two independent clauses in a compound sentence. Remember to use a coordinating conjunction, though. (*and, but, or, for, nor, so, or yet.*) Using only the comma without the conjunction is a serious grammatical error . . . a comma splice. An example of a comma splice: *Do not thank "luck" for your good work on the case, give yourself the credit you deserve.* To correct the sentence, add *but* just after the comma or change the comma to a semi-colon.
- ✓ Commas separate individual words, phrases, or clauses in a series. *To finish the assessment, you must complete the CY-48, the CY-104, and the agency assessment packet.*
- ✓ Commas separate adjective and adverb clauses. Adjective clauses begin with *who, whom, whose, which, that, when, where, or why.* Adverb clauses begin with *because, although, before.*
- ✓ Commas are used to separate contrasted elements from the rest of the sentence. *We need strong legal cases, not strong emotions, to win in court.*
- ✓ Use commas to set off parenthetical and transitional expressions, interjections, direct address, and tag questions.

Parenthetical: *Some studies, incidentally, have shown this to be the case.*

Interjections: *My God, who wouldn't care for a helpless child?*

Direct address: *So, placement workers, are we in agreement with this form?*



Tag questions: (echo the statement preceding them) *PACWIS is not geared to provide FSP reminders, is it?*

- ✓ Commas are used to set off titles, initials, or names that follow a surname. *John Marklin, PhD., and Sean Daniels, Jr., will be called as witnesses.*
- ✓ Commas are used to separate the exact words of a speaker from the rest of the sentence. *“I didn’t know,” she told me, “that the child got out the unlocked front door.”*
- ✓ Commas can be used to add clarity. *Still liquids are necessary to sustain life* means something quite different than *Still, liquids are necessary to sustain life.*

Semicolons (Flashing red light)

Semicolons have the effect of signaling a pause that is stronger than a comma, but not as full as a period. It provides a means to show two closely related clauses, with the second restating the idea of the first, or contrasting the idea of the first.

- ✓ Use semicolons to separate two independent clauses not connected by a subordinate conjunction. In the “comma example” above, remember we can correct the sentence by saying, *“Do not thank “luck” for your success on that case; give yourself the credit you deserve.”*
- ✓ Use semicolons to separate groups of words already containing commas. *The family needs toothbrushes, deodorants, soaps; shoes, winter jackets, sweaters; bread, milk, canned goods, and meats.*
- ✓ Semicolons go outside quotation marks.

Colons (Flashing red light)

Colons are used to introduce a sentence of explanation, introduce a series, list, or quote; separate hours from minutes and seconds; titles and subtitles, and parts of bibliographical references. Colons can add impact to a sentence or phrase when used for emphasis or explanation. It may also follow a salutation in a business letter.

- ✓ Introduce an explanation. *The officers work uniform consists of many distinct items: a badge, a utility belt, a weapon, a nightstick, a flashlight, and a radio.*
- ✓ Introduce a list or series. *CYS personnel come from a variety of educational backgrounds: Bachelor of Arts, Sociology, Psychology, Bachelor in Social Work, Masters in Social Work, Masters in Public Administration, Paralegal Degree, Clerical Degree, and Accounting.*
- ✓ Add impact. *One thing accounts for increasing threat of injury and death at the hands of their parents: child abuse.*
- ✓ Distinguish between title and subtitle. *Helping in Child Protective Services: A Competency-Based Handbook, was compiled by the American Humane Association.*
- ✓ Salutation in business letters. *Dear Dr. MacIntyre:*

Dashes and Hyphens

- ✓ Dashes have a number of uses in our writing. Below is a sampling of those we might encounter in our work.

1. **Indicates a sudden break or change in the sentence.** *The assault—the physical assault that left the child with 3 broken bones, missing teeth, and a lacerated liver—was worse than the caseworker or the officer expected to see.*
 2. **Emphasizes a word, phrase, or clause.** *The writer is by nature a dreamer—a conscious dreamer.*
 3. **Used to set off an introductory series from an explanation of that series.** *Heath care, retirement package, specific training —there are a number of benefits to working in this field.*
 4. **Used to indicate interrupted or faltering speech in dialogue.** (Note two dashes between, and no spaces.) *I only heard one side of the conversation, Your Honor. I heard mother say, “No—I don’t know when—It’s none of your business—Sell it if you want, I don’t care.”*
 5. **Used to indicate missing words.** Then mother turned to me and said, “You d—snoop, get the f— out of my house.”
- ✓ Hyphens are used to make many compound words. It is also used to avoid confusion, or join two words that act as a single adjective.
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| 1. Compound word. | Mother-in-law |
| 2. Fractions. | Four-fifths |
| 3. Join a capital letter to a noun. | T-shirt |
| 4. Form a single adjective | slow-moving truck |
| 5. Form new word with a prefix | Ex-mayor, mid-June |
| 6. Avoid confusion | Re-cover the sofa |
| 7. Two or more words have a common element omitted from all but the last | four-, six-, and eight-point |

Exclamation point (Danger Ahead!)

It’s improper to use more than one exclamation point to express surprise or strong feelings.

Underlining (Italics in print)

- ✓ Used to indicate a foreign word or phrase not yet adopted in the English language. *Xin loi* is a Vietnamese expression for too bad, or tough luck.
- ✓ Used to indicate scientific terms. Some consider *Homo Erectus* to be the first man.
- ✓ Used to designate a word, phrase, number, or letter being emphasized. I got an A on the test.
- ✓ Used to indicate the title of books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, plays, films, radio and TV programs, musical compositions, record albums, etc.

Apostrophe

Some forms of possessive plural, collective ownership, and compound-noun possessives can cause trouble. To be safe, look it up if you don’t know.

Adapted from The St. Martin’s Handbook and Writer’s Inc.