

**PART 6**

# Punctuation

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# CHAPTER 27

## End Punctuation

End punctuation marks—the period, the question mark, and the exclamation point—signal the ends of sentences.

**Note** A grammar checker may flag missing question marks after direct questions or incorrect combinations of marks (such as a question mark and a period at the end of a sentence), but it cannot do much else.

### 27a Use periods after most sentences and with some abbreviations.

#### 1 Use a period to end a statement, mild command, or indirect question.

Statements

These are exciting and trying times.  
The airline went bankrupt.

Mild commands

Please do not smoke.  
Think of the possibilities.

If you are unsure whether to use an exclamation point or a period after a command, use a period. The exclamation point should be used only rarely (see p. 429).

An **indirect question** reports what someone has asked but not in the form or exact words of the original:

Indirect questions

Students sometimes wonder whether their teachers read the papers they write.  
Abused children eventually stop asking why they are being punished.

In standard American English, an indirect question uses the wording and subject-verb order of a statement: *The reporter asked why the negotiations failed, not why did the negotiations fail.*

#### 2 Use periods with some abbreviations.

Use periods with abbreviations that consist of or end in small letters. Otherwise, omit periods from abbreviations.

|     |           |      |      |            |
|-----|-----------|------|------|------------|
| Dr. | Mr., Mrs. | e.g. | Feb. | ft.        |
| St. | Ms.       | i.e. | p.   | a.m., p.m. |
| PhD | BC, BCE   | USA  | IBM  | AM, PM     |
| BA  | AD, CE    | US   | USMC | AIDS       |

**Note** When a sentence ends in an abbreviation with a period, don't add a second period: *My first class is at 8 a.m.*

See also pages 500–03 on uses of abbreviations in writing.

**EXERCISE 27.1 Revising: Periods**

Revise the following sentences so that periods are used correctly. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

Several times I wrote to ask when my subscription ended?  
 Several times I wrote to ask when my subscription ended.

1. The instructor asked when Plato wrote *The Republic*?
2. Give the date within one century
3. The exact date is not known, but it is estimated at 370 BCE
4. Dr Arn will lecture on Plato at 7:30 p.m..
5. The area of the lecture hall is only 1600 sq ft

**27b Use question marks after direct questions and sometimes to indicate doubt.**

**1 Use a question mark with a direct question.**

What is the difference between these two people?  
 Will economists ever really understand the economy?

After an indirect question, use a period: *The senator asked why the bill had passed.* (See opposite.)

Questions in a series are each followed by a question mark:

The officer asked how many times the suspect had been arrested.  
 Three times? Four times? More than that?

The use of capital letters for questions in a series is optional (see p. 491).

**Note** Question marks are never combined with other question marks, exclamation points, periods, or commas:

Faulty “What is the point?,” readers ask.  
 Revised “What is the point?” readers ask.

**2 Use a question mark within parentheses to indicate doubt about a number or date.**

The Greek philosopher Socrates was born in 470 (?) BC and died in 399 BC from drinking poison after having been condemned to death.

**Note** Don't use a question mark within parentheses to express sarcasm or irony. Express these attitudes through sentence structure and word choice. (See Chapters 23 and 38.)

Faulty Stern's friendliness (?) bothered Crane.  
 Revised Stern's insincerity bothered Crane.

**EXERCISE 27.2 Revising: Question marks**

Revise the following sentences so that question marks (along with other punctuation marks) are used correctly. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

“When will it end?,” cried the man dressed in rags.  
 “When will it end?” cried the man dressed in rags.

1. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus took seven years to travel from Troy to Ithaca. Or was it eight years. Or more?
2. Odysseus must have wondered whether he would ever make it home?
3. “What man are you and whence?,” asks Odysseus's wife, Penelope.
4. Why does Penelope ask, “Where is your city? Your family?”?
5. Penelope does not recognize Odysseus and asks who this stranger is?

## 27c Use an exclamation point after an emphatic statement, interjection, or command.

No! We must not lose this election!  
Come here immediately!

Follow mild interjections and commands with commas or periods, as appropriate:

No, the response was not terrific.!  
To prolong your car's life, change its oil regularly.

Use exclamation points sparingly, not to express sarcasm, irony, or amazement. Rely on sentence structure and word choice to express these attitudes. (See Chapters 23 and 38.)

Faulty After traveling 4.4 billion miles through space, *Voyager 2* was off-target by 21 miles (!).  
Revised After traveling 4.4 billion miles through space, *Voyager 2* was off-target by a mere 21 miles.

Relying on the exclamation point for emphasis is like crying wolf: the mark loses its power to impress the reader. Frequent exclamation points can also make writing sound overemotional:

Overused exclamation points  
Our city government is a mess! After just six months in office, the mayor has had to fire four city officials! In the same period the city councilors have done nothing but argue! And city services decline with each passing day!

**Note** Exclamation points are never combined with other exclamation points, question marks, periods, or commas:

Faulty "This will not be endured!," he roared.  
Revised "This will not be endured!" he roared.

### EXERCISE 27.3 Revising: Exclamation points

Revise the following sentences so that exclamation points (along with other punctuation marks) are used correctly. If a sentence is punctuated correctly as given, mark the number preceding it. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

"Well, now!," he said loudly.  
"Well, now!" he said loudly.

1. As the firefighters moved their equipment into place, the police shouted, "Move back!"
2. A child's cries could be heard from above: "Help me. Help."
3. When the child was rescued, the crowd called "Hooray."
4. The rescue was the most exciting event of the day!
5. Let me tell you about it.

### EXERCISE 27.4 Revising: End punctuation

Insert appropriate punctuation (periods, question marks, or exclamation points) where needed in the following paragraph. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

When visitors first arrive in Hawaii, they often encounter an unexpected language barrier Standard English is the language of business and government, but many of the people speak Pidgin English Instead of an excited "Aloha" the visitors may be greeted with an excited Pidgin "Howzit" or asked if they know "how fo' find one good hotel" Many Hawaiians question whether Pidgin will hold children back because it prevents communication with the *haoles*, or Caucasians, who run businesses Yet many others feel that Pidgin is a last defense of ethnic diversity on the islands To those who want to make standard English the official language of the state, these Hawaiians may respond, "Just 'cause I speak Pidgin no mean I dumb" They may ask, "Why you no listen" or, in standard English, "Why don't you listen"

**Note** See page 488 for a punctuation exercise combining periods with other marks of punctuation.

## CHAPTER 28

### The Comma

Commas usually function within sentences to separate elements (see the box on the next page). Omitting needed commas or inserting needless ones can confuse the reader:

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Comma needed    | Though very tall Abraham Lincoln was not an overbearing man.   |
| Revised         | Though very tall, Abraham Lincoln was not an overbearing man.  |
| Unneeded commas | The hectic pace of Beirut, broke suddenly into frightening chaos when the city became, the focus of civil war. |
| Revised         | The hectic pace of Beirut broke suddenly into frightening chaos when the city became the focus of civil war.   |

**Note** Grammar and style checkers will ignore many comma errors. For example, a checker failed to catch the missing commas in *The boat ran aground and we were stranded* and in *We cooked lasagna spinach and apple pie*. At the same time the checker overlooked the misused commas in *The trip was short but, the weather was perfect* and *The travelers were tempted by, the many shops, and varied restaurants*.

#### 28a Use a comma before *and*, *but*, or another coordinating conjunction linking main clauses.

The coordinating conjunctions are *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*. When these link words or phrases, do not use a comma: *Dugain plays and sings Irish and English folk songs*. However, *do* use a comma when a coordinating conjunction joins main clauses. A **main clause** has a subject and a predicate (but no subordinating word at the beginning) and makes a complete statement (see p. 252).

Caffeine can keep coffee drinkers alert, and it may elevate their mood.  
 Caffeine was once thought to be safe, but now researchers warn of harmful effects.  
 Coffee drinkers may suffer sleeplessness, for the drug acts as a stimulant to the nervous system.

**Note** Do not add a comma *after* a coordinating conjunction between main clauses (see also pp. 448–49):

Not Caffeine increases the heart rate, and, it constricts blood vessels.  
 But Caffeine increases the heart rate, and it constricts blood vessels.

**Exceptions** When the main clauses in a sentence are very long or grammatically complicated, or when they contain internal punctuation, a semicolon before the coordinating conjunction will clarify the division between clauses (see p. 457):

Caffeine may increase alertness, elevate mood, and provide energy; but it may also cause irritability, anxiety, stomach pains, and other ills.

When main clauses are very short and closely related in meaning, you may omit the comma between them as long as the resulting sentence is clear:

Caffeine helps but it also hurts.

If you are in doubt about whether to use a comma in such a sentence, use it. It will always be correct.

### EXERCISE 28.1 Punctuating linked main clauses

Insert a comma before each coordinating conjunction that links main clauses in the following sentences. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

I would have attended the concert and the reception but I had to baby-sit for my niece.

I would have attended the concert and the reception, but I had to baby-sit for my niece.

1. Parents once automatically gave their children the father's surname but some no longer do.
2. Instead, they bestow the mother's name for they believe that the mother's importance should be recognized.
3. The child's surname may be just the mother's or it may link the mother's and the father's with a hyphen.
4. Sometimes the first and third children will have the mother's surname and the second child will have the father's.
5. Occasionally the mother and father combine parts of their names and a new hybrid surname is born.

### EXERCISE 28.2 Sentence combining: Linked main clauses

Combine each group of sentences below into one sentence that contains only two main clauses connected by the coordinating conjunction in parentheses. Separate the main clauses with a comma. You will have to add, delete, and rearrange words. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

The circus had come to town. The children wanted to see it. Their parents wanted to see it. (*and*)

The circus had come to town, and the children and their parents wanted to see it.

1. Parents were once legally required to bestow the father's surname on their children. These laws have been contested in court. They have been found invalid. (*but*)
2. Parents may now give their children any surname they choose. The arguments for bestowing the mother's surname are often strong. They are often convincing. (*and*)
3. Critics sometimes question the effects of unusual surnames on children. They wonder how confusing the new surnames will be. They wonder how fleeting the surnames will be. (*or*)
4. Children with surnames different from their parents' may suffer embarrassment. They may suffer identity problems. Giving children their father's surname is still very much the norm. (*for*)
5. Hyphenated names are awkward. They are also difficult to pass on. Some observers think they will die out in the next generation. Or they may die out before. (*so*)

## 28b Use a comma to set off most introductory elements.

An introductory element modifies a word or words in the main clause that follows. These elements are usually set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma:

Subordinate clause (p. 252)

Even when identical twins are raised apart, they grow up very like each other.

Because they are similar, such twins interest scientists.

Verbal or verbal phrase (p. 247)

Explaining the similarity, some researchers claim that one's genes are one's destiny.

Concerned, other researchers deny the claim.





Nonessential element

The company, which is located in Oklahoma, has a good reputation.

This **nonessential element** may modify or rename the word it refers to (*company* in the example), but it does not limit the word to a particular individual or group. (Because it does not restrict meaning, a nonessential element is also called a **nonrestrictive element**.) Non-essential elements are *not* essential, but punctuation *is*.

In contrast, an **essential** (or **restrictive**) element *does* limit the word it refers to:

Essential element

The company rewards employees who work hard.

In this example the underlined essential element cannot be omitted without leaving the meaning of *employees* too general. Because it is essential, such an element is *not* set off with commas. The element *is* essential, but punctuation is *not*.

#### v **Meaning and context**

The same element in the same sentence may be essential or nonessential depending on your intended meaning and the context in which the sentence appears. For example, look at the second sentence in each of the following passages:

Essential

Not all the bands were equally well received, however. The band playing old music held the audience's attention. The other groups created much less excitement. [*Playing old music* identifies a particular band.]

Nonessential

A new band called Fats made its debut on Saturday night. The band, playing old music, held the audience's attention. If this performance is typical, the group has a bright future. [*Playing old music* adds information about a band already named.]

#### v **Punctuation of interrupting nonessential elements**

When a nonessential element falls in the middle of a sentence, be sure to set it off with a pair of commas, one *before* and one *after* the element. Dashes or parentheses may also set off nonessential elements (see pp. 480 and 482).

### 1 **Use a comma or commas to set off nonessential clauses and phrases.**

Clauses and phrases serving as adjectives and adverbs may be either nonessential or essential. In the following examples the underlined clauses and phrases are nonessential: they could be omitted without changing the meaning of the words they modify.

Nonessential

Elizabeth Blackwell was the first woman to graduate from an American medical school, in 1849.

She was a medical pioneer, helping to found the first medical college for women.

She taught at the school, which was affiliated with the New York Infirmary.

Blackwell, who published books and papers on medicine, practiced pediatrics and gynecology.

She moved to England in 1869, when she was forty-eight.

**Note** Most adverb clauses are essential because they describe conditions necessary to the main clause. They are set off by a comma only when they introduce sentences (see p. 433) and when they are truly nonessential, adding incidental information (as in the last example above) or expressing a contrast beginning *although*, *even though*, *though*, *whereas*, and the like.

In the following sentences, the underlined elements limit the meaning of the words they modify. Removing the elements would leave the meaning too general.

Essential

The history of aspirin began with the ancient Greeks.

Physicians who sought to relieve their patients' painsPhysicians recommended chewing willow bark.

Willow bark contains a chemical that is similar to aspirin.

**Note** Whereas both nonessential and essential clauses may begin with *which*, only essential clauses begin with *that*. Some writers prefer *that* exclusively for essential clauses and *which* exclusively for nonessential clauses. See the Glossary of Usage, page 879, for advice on the use of *that* and *which*.

## 2 Use a comma or commas to set off nonessential appositives.

An **appositive** is a noun or noun substitute that renames another noun just before it. (See p. 257.) Many appositives are nonessential; thus they are set off, usually with commas.

Nonessential

Toni Morrison's fifth novel, *Beloved*, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988.  
Morrison, a native of Ohio, won the Nobel Prize in 1993.

Take care *not* to set off essential appositives; like other essential elements, they limit or define the word to which they refer.

Essential

Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* is about an African American girl who longs for blue eyes.  
The critic Michiko Kakutani says that Morrison's work "stands radiantly on its own as an American epic."

## 3 Use a comma or commas to set off transitional or parenthetical expressions.

### v Transitional expressions

**Transitional expressions** form links between ideas. They include conjunctive adverbs such as *however* and *moreover* as well as other words or phrases such as *for example* and *of course*. (See pp. 85–86 for a list of transitional words and phrases.) Transitional expressions are nonessential, so set them off with a comma or commas:

American workers, for example, receive fewer holidays than European workers do.

When a transitional expression links main clauses, precede it with a semicolon and follow it with a comma. (See p. 455.)

European workers often have long paid vacations; indeed, they may receive a full month.

**Note** The conjunctions *and*, *but*, and *yet* are sometimes used as transitional expressions but are not followed by commas (see p. 448). Nor are commas required after some transitional expressions that we read without pauses, such as *also*, *hence*, *next*, *now*, and *thus*. A few transitional expressions, notably *therefore* and *instead*, do not need commas when they fall inside or at the ends of clauses.

American workers thus put in more work days. But the days themselves may be shorter.

### v Parenthetical expressions

**Parenthetical expressions** provide comments, explanations, digressions, or other supplementary information not essential to meaning—for example, *fortunately*, *unfortunately*, *all things considered*, *to be frank*, *in other words*. Set parenthetical expressions off with commas:

Few people would know, or even guess, the most celebrated holiday on earth.

That holiday is, surprisingly, New Year's Day.

(Dashes and parentheses may also set off parenthetical expressions. See pp. 480 and 482, respectively.)

**4 Use a comma or commas to set off *yes* and *no*, tag questions, words of direct address, and mild interjections.**

*Yes* and *no*

Yes, the editorial did have a point.

No, that can never be.

Tag questions

Jones should be allowed to vote, should he not?

They don't stop to consider others, do they?

Direct address

Cody, please bring me the newspaper.

With all due respect, sir, I will not do that.

Mild interjections

Well, you will never know who did it.

Oh, they forgot all about the baby.

(You may want to use an exclamation point to set off a forceful interjection. See p. 428.)

**EXERCISE 28.5 Punctuating essential and nonessential elements**

Insert commas in the following sentences to set off nonessential elements, and delete any commas that incorrectly set off essential elements. If a sentence is correct as given, mark the number preceding it. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

Our language has adopted the words, *garage* and *fanfare*, from the French.

Our language has adopted the words *garage* and *fanfare* from the French.

1. Italians insist that Marco Polo the thirteenth-century explorer did not import pasta from China.
2. Pasta which consists of flour and water and often egg existed in Italy long before Marco Polo left for his travels.
3. A historian who studied pasta says that it originated in the Middle East in the fifth century.
4. Most Italians dispute this account although their evidence is shaky.
5. Wherever pasta originated, the Italians are now the undisputed masters, in making and cooking it.
6. Marcella Hazan, who has written several books on Italian cooking, insists that homemade and hand-rolled pasta is the best.
7. Most cooks must buy dried pasta lacking the time to make their own.
8. The finest pasta is made from semolina, a flour from hard durum wheat.
9. Pasta manufacturers choose hard durum wheat, because it makes firmer cooked pasta than common wheat does.
10. Pasta, made from common wheat, tends to get soggy in boiling water.

**EXERCISE 28.6 Sentence combining: Essential and nonessential elements**

Combine each pair of sentences below into one sentence that uses the element described in parentheses. Insert commas as appropriate. You will have to add, delete, change, and rearrange words. Some items have more than one possible answer. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

Mr. Ward's oldest sister helped keep him alive. She was a nurse in the hospital. (*Nonessential clause beginning who.*)

Mr. Ward's oldest sister, who was a nurse in the hospital, helped keep him alive.

1. American colonists first imported pasta from the English. The English had discovered it as tourists in Italy. (*Nonessential clause beginning who.*)
2. The English returned from their grand tours of Italy. They were called macaronis because of their fancy airs. (*Essential phrase beginning returning.*)
3. A hair style was also called macaroni. It had elaborate curls. (*Essential phrase beginning with.*)
4. The song "Yankee Doodle" refers to this hairdo. It reports that Yankee Doodle "stuck a feather in his cap and called it macaroni." (*Essential clause beginning when.*)

5. The song was actually intended to poke fun at unrefined American colonists. It was a creation of the English. (*Nonessential appositive beginning a creation.*)

## 28d Use a comma or commas to set off absolute phrases.

An **absolute phrase** modifies a whole main clause rather than any word in the clause, and it usually consists of at least a participle (such as *done* or *having torn*) and its subject (a noun or pronoun). (See p. 251.) Absolute phrases can occur at almost any point in the sentence, and they are always set off by a comma or commas:

Household recycling having succeeded, the city now wants to extend the program to businesses.

Many businesses, their profits already squeezed, resist recycling.

## 28e Use a comma or commas to set off phrases expressing contrast.

The essay needs less wit, more pith.

The substance, not the style, is important.

Substance, unlike style, cannot be faked.

**Note** Writers often omit commas around contrasting phrases beginning with *but*: *A full but hazy moon shone down.*

### EXERCISE 28.7 Punctuating absolute phrases and phrases of contrast

Insert commas in the following sentences to set off absolute phrases and phrases of contrast. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

The recording contract was canceled the band having broken up.

The recording contract was canceled, the band having broken up.

1. Prices having risen rapidly the government debated a price freeze.
2. A price freeze unlike a rise in interest rates seemed a sure solution.
3. The President would have to persuade businesses to accept a price freeze his methods depending on their resistance.
4. No doubt the President his advisers having urged it would first try a patriotic appeal.
5. The President not his advisers insisted on negotiations with businesses.

## 28f Use commas between items in a series and between coordinate adjectives.

### 1 Use commas between words, phrases, or clauses forming a series.

Place commas between all elements of a **series**—that is, three or more items of equal importance:

Anna Spingle married at the age of seventeen, had three children by twenty-one, and divorced at twenty-two.

She worked as a cook, a baby-sitter, and a crossing guard.

Some writers omit the comma before the coordinating conjunction in a series (*Breakfast consisted of coffee, eggs and kippers*). But the final comma is never wrong, and it always helps the reader see the last two items as separate:

Confusing Spingle's new job involves typing, filing and answering correspondence.

Clear Spingle's new job involves typing, filing, and answering correspondence.

**Exception** When items in a series are long and grammatically complicated, they may be separated by semicolons. When the items contain commas, they must be separated by semicolons. (See p. 257.)

## 2 Use commas between two or more adjectives that equally modify the same word.

When two or more adjectives modify the same word equally, they are said to be **coordinate**. The adjectives may be separated either by *and* or by a comma, as in the following examples.

Spingle's scratched and dented car is old, but it gets her to work.

She has dreams of a sleek, shiny car.

Adjectives are not coordinate—and should *not* be separated by commas—when the one nearer the noun is more closely related to the noun in meaning. In each of the next examples, the second adjective and the noun form a unit that is modified by the first adjective:

Spingle's children work at various part-time jobs.

They all expect to go to a nearby community college.

See the box above for a test to use in punctuating adjectives.

**Note** Numbers are not coordinate with other adjectives:

Faulty Spingle has three, teenaged children.

Revised Spingle has three teenaged children.

Do not use a comma between the final adjective and the noun:

Faulty The children hope to achieve good, well-paying, jobs.

Revised The children hope to achieve good, well-paying jobs.

### EXERCISE 28.8 Punctuating series and coordinate adjectives

Insert commas in the following sentences to separate coordinate adjectives or elements in series. Mark the number preceding each sentence whose punctuation is already correct. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

Quiet by day, the club became a noisy smoky dive at night.

Quiet by day, the club became a noisy, smoky dive at night.

1. Shoes with high heels originated to protect feet from the mud garbage and animal waste in the streets.
2. The first known high heels worn strictly for fashion appeared in the sixteenth century.
3. The heels were worn by men and made of colorful silk brocades soft suedes or smooth leathers.
4. High-heeled shoes received a boost when the short powerful King Louis XIV of France began wearing them.
5. Eventually only wealthy fashionable French women wore high heels.

## 28g Use commas according to convention in dates, addresses, place names, and long numbers.

Use commas to separate most parts of dates, addresses, and place names: *June 20, 1950; 24 Fifth Avenue, Suite 601; Cairo, Illi-nois*. Within a sentence, any element preceded by a comma should be followed by a comma as well, as in the examples below:

Dates

July 4, 1776, is the date the Declaration of Independence was signed.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941, prompted American entry into World War II.

Do not use commas between the parts of a date in inverted order: *Their anniversary on 15 December 2005 was their fiftieth.* You need not use commas in dates consisting of a month or season and a year: *For the United States the war ended in August 1945.*

Addresses and place names

Columbus, Ohio, is the state capital and the location of Ohio State University.

The population of Garden City, Long Island, New York, is 30,000.

Use the address 220 Cornell Road, Woodside, California 94062, for all correspondence.

Do not use a comma between a state and a zip code.

Long numbers

Use the comma to separate the figures in long numbers into groups of three, counting from the right. With numbers of four digits, the comma is optional.

A kilometer is 3,281 feet [or 3281 feet].

The new assembly plant cost \$7,535,000 to design and build.

Usage in American English differs from that in some other languages and dialects, which use a period, not a comma, to separate the figures in long numbers.

#### EXERCISE 28.9 Punctuating dates, addresses, place names, numbers

Insert commas as needed in the following sentences.

*Example:*

The house cost \$27000 fifteen years ago.

The house cost \$27,000 fifteen years ago.

1. The festival will hold a benefit dinner and performance on March 10 2006 in Asheville.
2. The organizers hope to raise more than \$100000 from donations and ticket sales.
3. Performers are expected from as far away as Milan Italy and Kyoto Japan.
4. All inquiries sent to Mozart Festival PO Box 725 Asheville North Carolina 28803 will receive a quick response.
5. The deadline for ordering tickets by mail is Monday December 3 2005.

## 28h Use commas with quotations according to standard practice.

The words *he said*, *she writes*, and so on identify the source of a quotation. These **signal phrases** may come before, after, or in the middle of the quotation. A signal phrase must always be separated from the quotation by punctuation, usually a comma or commas.

**Note** Additional issues with quotations are discussed elsewhere in this book:

- v **Using quotation marks conventionally**, pages 468–75.
- v **Choosing and transcribing quotations from sources**, pages 620–21.
- v **Integrating source material into your text**, pages 623–28.
- v **Acknowledging the sources of quotations to avoid plagiarism**, pages 633–34 and 637–38.
- v **Formatting long prose quotations and poetry quotations** in MLA style, pages 688–89; Chicago style, page 776; and APA style, pages 802–03.

### 1 Ordinarily, use a comma with a signal phrase before or after a quotation.

Eleanor Roosevelt said, “You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

“Knowledge is power,” writes Francis Bacon.

**Exceptions** Do not use a comma when a signal phrase follows a quotation ending in an exclamation point or a question mark:

“Claude!” Mrs. Harrison called.  
 “Why must I come home?” he asked.

Do not use commas with a quotation introduced by *that* or with a quotation that is integrated into your sentence structure:

James Baldwin insists that “one must never, in one’s life, accept . . . injustices as commonplace.”  
 Baldwin thought that the violence of a riot “had been devised as a corrective” to his own violence.

Use a colon instead of a comma between a signal phrase and a quotation when the signal phrase is actually a complete sentence and the quotation is very formal or longer than a sentence.

The Bill of Rights is unambiguous: “Congress shall make no law re-specting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

## 2 With an interrupted quotation, precede the signal phrase with a comma and follow it with the punctuation required by the quotation.

Quotation

“The shore has a dual nature, changing with the swing of the tides.”

Signal phrase

“The shore has a dual nature,” observes Rachel Carson, “changing with the swing of the tides.” [The signal phrase interrupts the quotation at a comma and thus ends with a comma.]

Quotation

“However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names.”

Signal phrase

“However mean your life is, meet it and live it,” Thoreau advises in *Walden*; “do not shun it and call it hard names.” [The signal phrase interrupts the quotation at a semicolon and thus ends with a semicolon.]

Quotation

“This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this new faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.”

Signal phrase

“This is the faith with which I return to the South,” Martin Luther King, Jr., proclaimed. “With this new faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.” [The signal phrase interrupts the quotation at the end of a sentence and thus ends with a period.]

**Note** Using a comma instead of a semicolon or a period after the Thoreau and King signal phrases would result in the error called a comma splice: two main clauses separated only by a comma. (See pp. 342–47.)

## 3 Place commas that follow quotations within quotation marks.

“Death is not the greatest loss in life<sup>m</sup>,” claims Norman Cousins.

“The greatest loss<sup>m</sup>,” Cousins says, “is what dies inside us while we live.”

### EXERCISE 28.10 Punctuating quotations

Insert commas or semicolons in the following sentences to correct punctuation with quotations. Mark the number preceding any sentence whose punctuation is already correct. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

The shoplifter declared “I didn’t steal anything.”

The shoplifter declared, “I didn’t steal anything.”

1. The writer and writing teacher Peter Elbow proposes an “open-ended writing process” that “can change you, not just your words.”

2. "I think of the open-ended writing process as a voyage in two stages" Elbow says.
3. "The sea voyage is a process of divergence, branching, proliferation, and confusion" Elbow continues "the coming to land is a process of convergence, pruning, centralizing, and clarifying."
4. "Keep up one session of writing long enough to get loosened up and tired" advises Elbow "long enough in fact to make a bit of a voyage."
5. "In coming to new land" Elbow says "you develop a new conception of what you are writing about."

## 28i Use commas to prevent misreading.

In some sentences words may run together in unintended and confusing ways unless a comma separates them:

Confusing    Soon after the business closed its doors.  
 Clear        Soon after, the business closed its doors.

Always check whether a comma added to prevent misreading might cause some other confusion or error. In the first example below, the comma prevents *pasta* and *places* from running into each other as *pasta places*, but it separates the subject (*historian*) and the verb (*places*). The revision solves both problems.

Faulty        A historian who studied pasta, places its origin in the Middle East.  
 Revised      A historian who studied pasta says that it originated in the Middle East.

### EXERCISE 28.11 Punctuating to prevent misreading

Insert commas in the following sentences to prevent misreading. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

To Laura Ann symbolized decadence.  
 To Laura, Ann symbolized decadence.

1. Though happy people still have moments of self-doubt.
2. In research subjects have reported themselves to be generally happy people.
3. Among those who have life has included sufferings as well as joys.
4. Of fifty eight subjects reported bouts of serious depression.
5. For half the preceding year had included at least one personal crisis.

## 28j Use commas only where required.

Commas can make sentences choppy and even confusing if they are used more often than needed. The main misuses of commas are summarized in the box opposite.

### 1 Delete any comma after a subject or a verb.

Commas interrupt the movement from subject to verb to object or complement, as in the following faulty examples.

Faulty        The returning soldiers, received a warmer welcome than they expected. [Separation of subject and verb.]

Revised      The returning soldiers received a warmer welcome than they expected.

Faulty        They had chosen, to fight for their country. [Separation of verb *chosen* and object *to fight*.]

Revised      They had chosen to fight for their country.

**Exception** Use commas between subject, verb, and object or complement only when other words between these elements require punctuation:



Americans, who are preoccupied with other sports, have only re-cently developed an interest in professional soccer. [Commas set off a nonessential clause.]

**2 Delete any comma that separates a pair of words, phrases, or subordinate clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction.**

When linking elements with *and*, *or*, or another coordinating conjunction, do not use a comma unless the elements are main clauses (see p. 432):

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Faulty  | Banks could, and should help older people manage their money. [Compound helping verb.]   |
| Revised | Banks could and should help older people manage their money.   |
| Faulty  | Older people need special assistance because they live on fixed incomes, and because they are not familiar with new accounts, and rates. [Compound subordinate clauses <i>because</i> . . . <i>because</i> and compound object of preposition <i>with</i> .] |
| Revised | Older people need special assistance because they live on fixed incomes and because they are not familiar with new accounts and rates.   |
| Faulty  | Banks, and community groups can assist the elderly, and eliminate the confusion they often feel. [Compound subject and compound predicate.]  |
| Revised | Banks and community groups can assist the elderly and eliminate the confusion they often feel.   |

**3 Delete any comma after a conjunction.**

The coordinating conjunctions (*and*, *but*, and so on) and the subordinating conjunctions (*although*, *because*, and so on) are not followed by commas:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Faulty  | Parents of adolescents notice increased conflict at puberty, and, they complain of bickering. |
| Revised | Parents of adolescents notice increased conflict at puberty, and they complain of bickering.  |
| Faulty  | Although, other primates leave the family at adolescence, humans do not.                      |
| Revised | Although other primates leave the family at adolescence, humans do not.                       |

**4 Delete any commas that set off essential elements.**

Commas do not set off an essential element, which limits the meaning of the word to which it refers (see p. 435):

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Faulty  | Hawthorne's work, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> , was the first major American novel. [The title is essential to distinguish the novel from the rest of Hawthorne's work.] |
| Revised | Hawthorne's work <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> was the first major American novel.   |
| Faulty  | The symbols, that Hawthorne uses, have influenced other novelists. [The clause identifies which symbols have been influential.]  |
| Revised | The symbols that Hawthorne uses have influenced other novelists.   |

Quoted or italicized words are essential appositives when they limit the word they refer to (see p. 437). Do not use commas around an essential appositive:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Faulty  | James Joyce's short story, "The Dead," was made into an affecting film. [The commas imply wrongly that Joyce wrote only one story.] |
| Revised | James Joyce's short story "The Dead" was made into an affecting film.   |
| Faulty  | The word, <i>open</i> , can be either a verb or an adjective.   |
| Revised | The word <i>open</i> can be either a verb or an adjective.  |

The following sentence requires commas because the quoted title is a nonessential appositive:

Her only poem about death, "Mourning," was printed in *The New Yorker*.

**5 Delete any comma before or after a series unless a rule requires it.**

Commas separate the items *within* a series (p. 441) but do not separate the series from the rest of the sentence:

Faulty The skills of, hunting, herding, and agriculture, sustained the Native Americans.  
 Revised The skills of hunting, herding, and agriculture sustained the Native Americans.

In the sentence below, the commas around the series are appropriate because the series is a nonessential appositive (p. 437):

The four major television networks, ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC, face fierce competition from the cable networks.

However, many writers prefer to use dashes rather than commas to set off series functioning as appositives (see p. 480).

**6 Delete any comma setting off an indirect quotation.**

Faulty The report concluded, that dieting could be more dangerous than overeating.  
 Revised The report concluded that dieting could be more dangerous than overeating.

**EXERCISE 28.12 Revising: Needless or misused commas**

Revise the following sentences to eliminate needless or misused commas. Mark the number preceding each sentence that is already punctuated correctly. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

The portrait of the founder, that hung in the dining hall, was stolen by pranksters.  
 The portrait of the founder that hung in the dining hall was stolen by pranksters.

1. Nearly 32 million US residents, speak a first language other than English.
2. After English the languages most commonly spoken in the United States are, Spanish, French, and German.
3. Almost 75 percent of the people, who speak foreign languages, used the words, “good” or “very good,” when judging their proficiency in English.
4. Recent immigrants, especially those speaking Spanish, Chinese, and Korean, tended to judge their English more harshly.
5. The states with the highest proportion of foreign language speakers, are New Mexico, and California.

**EXERCISE 28.13 Revising: Commas**

Insert commas in the following paragraphs wherever they are needed, and eliminate any misused or needless commas. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

Ellis Island New York reopened for business in 1990 but now the customers are tourists not immigrants. This spot which lies in New York Harbor was the first American soil seen, or touched by many of the nation’s immigrants. Though other places also served as ports of entry for foreigners none has the symbolic power of, Ellis Island. Between its opening in 1892 and its closing in 1954, over 20 million people about two-thirds of all immigrants were detained there before taking up their new lives in the United States. Ellis Island processed over 2000 newcomers a day when immigration was at its peak between 1900 and 1920.

As the end of a long voyage and the introduction to the New World Ellis Island must have left something to be desired. The “huddled masses” as the Statue of Liberty calls them indeed were huddled. New arrivals were herded about kept standing in lines for hours or days yelled at and abused. Assigned numbers they submitted their bodies to the pokings and proddings of the silent nurses and doctors, who were charged with ferreting out the slightest sign of sickness, disability or insanity. That test having been passed the immigrants faced interrogation by an official through an interpreter. Those, with names deemed inconveniently long or difficult to pronounce, often found themselves permanently labeled with abbreviations, of their names, or with the names, of their hometowns. But, millions survived the examination humiliation and confusion, to take the last short boat ride to New York City. For many of them and especially for their descendants Ellis Island eventually became not a nightmare but the place where life began.

**Note** See page 488 for a punctuation exercise combining commas with other marks of punctuation.

## CHAPTER 29

# The Semicolon

The semicolon separates equal and balanced sentence elements, usually main clauses (opposite through p. 456), sometimes items in series (p. 457).

**Note** A grammar and style checker can spot a few errors in the use of semicolons. For example, a checker suggested using a semicolon after *perfect* in *The set was perfect, the director had planned every detail*, thus correcting a comma splice. But it missed the in-correct semicolon in *The set was perfect; deserted streets, dark houses, and gloomy mist* (a colon would be correct; see p. 477).

### 29a Use a semicolon between main clauses not joined by *and*, *but*, or another coordinating conjunction.

**Main clauses** contain a subject and a predicate and do not begin with a subordinating word (see p. 252). When you join two main clauses in a sentence, you have two primary options for separating them:

✓ **Insert a comma and a coordinating conjunction:** *and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet.* (See p. 432.)  
The drug does little to relieve symptoms, and it can have side effects.

✓ **Insert a semicolon:**  
The side effects are not minor; some leave the patient quite ill.

**Note** If you do not link main clauses with a coordinating conjunction and you separate them only with a comma or with no punctuation at all, you will produce a comma splice or a fused sentence. (See Chapter 18.)

#### EXERCISE 29.1 Punctuating between main clauses

Insert semicolons to separate main clauses in the following sentences. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

One man at the auction bid prudently another spent his bank account.

One man at the auction bid prudently; another spent his bank account.

1. More and more musicians are playing computerized instruments more and more listeners are worrying about the future of acoustic instruments.
2. The computer is not the first new technology in music the pipe organ and saxophone were also technological breakthroughs in their day.

3. Musicians have always experimented with new technology audi-ences have always resisted the experiments.
4. Most computer musicians are not merely following the latest fad they are discovering new sounds and new ways to manipulate sound.
5. Few musicians have abandoned acoustic instruments most value acoustic sounds as much as electronic sounds.

### EXERCISE 29.2 Sentence combining: Related main clauses

Combine each set of three sentences below into one sentence containing only two main clauses, and insert a semicolon between the clauses. You will have to add, delete, change, and rearrange words. Most items have more than one possible answer. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

The painter Andrew Wyeth is widely admired. He is not universally admired. Some critics view his work as sentimental.

The painter Andrew Wyeth is widely but not universally admired; some critics view his work as sentimental.

1. Electronic instruments are prevalent in jazz. They are also prevalent in rock music. They are less common in classical music.
2. Jazz and rock change rapidly. They nourish experimentation. They nourish improvisation.
3. Traditional classical music does not change. Its notes and instrumentation were established by a composer. The composer was writing decades or centuries ago.
4. Contemporary classical music not only can draw on tradition. It also can respond to innovations. These are innovations such as jazz rhythms and electronic sounds.
5. Much contemporary electronic music is more than just one type of music. It is more than just jazz, rock, or classical. It is a fusion of all three.

## 29b Use a semicolon between main clauses related by *however*, *for example*, and *so on*.

Two kinds of words can relate main clauses: **conjunctive adverbs**, such as *consequently*, *hence*, *however*, *indeed*, and *thus* (see p. 261), and other **transitional expressions**, such as *even so*, *for example*, and *of course* (see pp. 85–86). When either of these connects two main clauses, the clauses should be separated by a semicolon:

An American immigrant, Levi Strauss, invented blue jeans in the 1860s; eventually, his product clothed working men throughout the West.

The position of the semicolon between main clauses never changes, but the conjunctive adverb or transitional expression may move around within a clause. The adverb or expression is usually set off with a comma or commas (see p. 436):

Blue jeans have become fashionable all over the world; however, the American originators still wear more jeans than anyone else.

Blue jeans have become fashionable all over the world; the American originators, however, still wear more jeans than anyone else.

Its mobility distinguishes a conjunctive adverb or transitional expression from other connecting words, such as coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. See pages 261–62 on this distinction.

**Note** If you use a comma or no punctuation at all between main clauses connected by a conjunctive adverb or transitional expression, you will produce a comma splice or a fused sentence. (See Chapter 18.)

### EXERCISE 29.3 Punctuating main clauses related by conjunctive adverbs or transitional expressions

Insert a semicolon in each of the following sentences to separate main clauses related by a conjunctive adverb or transitional expression. Also insert a comma or commas where needed to set off the adverb or expression. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

He knew that tickets for the concert would be scarce therefore he arrived at the box office hours before it opened.

He knew that tickets for the concert would be scarce; therefore, he arrived at the box office hours before it opened.

1. Music is a form of communication like language the basic elements however are not letters but notes.
2. Computers can process any information that can be represented numerically as a result they can process musical information.
3. A computer's ability to process music depends on what software it can run it must moreover be connected to a system that converts electrical vibration into sound.
4. Computers and their sound systems can produce many different sounds indeed the number of possible sounds is infinite.
5. The powerful music computers are very expensive therefore they are used only by professional musicians.

**EXERCISE 29.4 Sentence combining: Main clauses related by conjunctive adverbs or transitional expressions**

Combine each set of three sentences below into one sentence containing only two main clauses. Connect the clauses with the conjunctive adverb or transitional expression in parentheses, and separate them with a semicolon. Be sure the adverbs and expressions are punctuated appropriately. You will have to add, delete, change, and rearrange words. Each item has more than one possible answer. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

The Albanians censored their news. We got little news from them. And what we got was unreliable. (*therefore*)

The Albanians censored their news; therefore, the little news we got from them was unreliable.

1. Most music computers are too expensive for the average consumer. Digital keyboard instruments can be inexpensive. They are widely available. (*however*)
2. Inside the keyboard is a small computer. The computer controls a sound synthesizer. The instrument can both process and produce music. (*consequently*)
3. The person playing the keyboard presses keys or manipulates other controls. The computer and synthesizer convert these signals. The signals are converted into vibrations and sounds. (*immediately*)
4. The inexpensive keyboards can perform only a few functions. To the novice computer musician, the range is exciting. The range includes drum rhythms and simulated instruments. (*still*)
5. Would-be musicians can orchestrate whole songs. They start from just the melody lines. They need never again play "Chopsticks." (*thus*)

**29c Use a semicolon to separate main clauses if they are complicated or contain commas, even with a coordinating conjunction.**

We normally use a comma with a coordinating conjunction such as *and* or *but* between main clauses (see p. 432). But a semicolon makes a sentence easier to read when the main clauses contain commas or are grammatically complicated:

By a conscious effort of the mind, we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent.

—Henry David Thoreau

I doubt if the texture of Southern life is any more grotesque than that of the rest of the nation, but it does seem evident that the Southern writer is particularly adept at recognizing the grotesque; and to recognize the grotesque, you have to have some notion of what is not grotesque and why.—Flannery O'Connor

## 29d Use semicolons to separate items in a series if they are long or contain commas.

We normally use commas to separate items in a series (see p. 441). But when the items are long or internally punctuated, semicolons help readers identify the items:

The custody case involved Amy Dalton, the child; Ellen and Mark Dalton, the parents; and Ruth and Hal Blum, the grandparents.

One may even reasonably advance the claim that the sort of communication that really counts, and is therefore embodied into permanent records, is primarily written; that “words fly away, but written messages endure,” as the Latin saying put it two thousand years ago; and that there is no basic significance to at least fifty percent of the oral in-terchange that goes on among all sorts of persons, high and low.

—Mario Pei

### EXERCISE 29.5 Punctuating long main clauses and series items

Substitute semicolons for commas in the following sentences to separate main clauses or series items that are long or contain commas. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

After graduation he debated whether to settle in San Francisco, which was temperate but far from his parents, New York City, which was exciting but expensive, or Atlanta, which was close to home but already familiar.

After graduation he debated whether to settle in San Francisco, which was temperate but far from his parents; New York City, which was exciting but expensive; or Atlanta, which was close to home but already familiar.

1. The Indian subcontinent is separated from the rest of the world by clear barriers: the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea to the east and west, respectively, the Indian Ocean to the south, and 1600 miles of mountain ranges to the north.
2. In the north of India are the world’s highest mountains, the Hi-malayas, and farther south are fertile farmlands, unpopulated deserts, and rain forests.
3. India is a nation of ethnic and linguistic diversity, with numerous religions, including Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, with distinct castes and ethnic groups, and with sixteen languages, including the official Hindi and the “associate official” English.
4. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the British colonized most of India, taking control of government, the bureaucracy, and industry, and they assumed a social position above all Indians.
5. During British rule the Indians’ own unresolved differences and their frustrations with the British erupted in violent incidents such as the Sepoy Mutiny, which began on February 26, 1857, and lasted two years, the Amritsar Massacre on April 13, 1919, and violence between Hindus and Muslims during World War II that resulted in the separation of Pakistan from India.

## 29e Use the semicolon only where required.

Semicolons do not separate unequal sentence elements and should not be overused.

### 1 Delete or replace any semicolon that separates a subordinate clause or a phrase from a main clause.

The semicolon does not separate subordinate clauses from main clauses or phrases from main clauses:

Faulty Pigmies are in danger of extinction; because of encroaching development.

Revised Pigmies are in danger of extinction because of encroaching development.

Faulty According to African authorities; only about 35,000 Pigmies exist today.

Revised According to African authorities, only about 35,000 Pigmies exist today.

**Note** Many readers regard a phrase or subordinate clause set off with a semicolon as a kind of sentence fragment. (See Chapter 17.)

## 2 Delete or replace any semicolon that introduces a series or explanation.

Colons and dashes, not semicolons, introduce series, explanations, and so forth. (See p. 477.)

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| Faulty  | Teachers have heard all sorts of reasons why students do poorly; psychological problems, family illness, too much work, too little time. |
| Revised | Teachers have heard all sorts of reasons why students do poorly: psychological problems, family illness, too much work, too little time. |
| Revised | Teachers have heard all sorts of reasons why students do poorly—psychological problems, family illness, too much work, too little time.  |

## 3 Use the semicolon sparingly.

Use the semicolon only occasionally. Many semicolons in a passage, even when they are required by rule, often indicate repetitive sentence structure. To revise a passage with too many semicolons, you'll need to restructure your sentences, not just remove the semicolons. (See Chapter 26 for tips on varying sentences.)

Semicolon overused

The Make-a-Wish Foundation helps sick children; it grants the wishes of children who are terminally ill. The foundation learns of a child's wish; the information usually comes from parents, friends, or hospital staff; the wish may be for a special toy, a trip to the circus, or a visit to Disneyland. The foundation grants some wishes with its own funds; for other wishes it appeals to those who have what the child desires.

Revised

The Make-a-Wish Foundation grants the wishes of children who are terminally ill. From parents, friends, or hospital staff, the foundation learns of a child's wish for a special toy, a trip to the circus, or a visit to Disneyland. It grants some wishes with its own funds; for other wishes it appeals to those who have what the child desires.

### EXERCISE 29.6 Revising: Misused or overused semicolons

Revise the following sentences to eliminate misused or overused semicolons, substituting other punctuation as appropriate. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

*Example:*

The doctor gave everyone the same advice; get exercise.

The doctor gave everyone the same advice: get exercise.

1. The main religion in India is Hinduism; a way of life as well as a theology and philosophy.
2. Unlike Christianity and Judaism, Hinduism is a polytheistic religion; with deities numbering in the hundreds.
3. Hinduism is unlike many other religions; it allows its creeds and practices to vary widely from place to place and person to person. Other religions have churches; Hinduism does not. Other religions have principal prophets and holy books; Hinduism does not. Other religions center on specially trained priests or other leaders; Hinduism promotes the individual as his or her own priest.
4. In Hindu belief there are four types of people; reflective, emotional, active, and experimental.
5. Each type of person has a different technique for realizing the true, immortal self; which has infinite existence, infinite knowledge, and infinite joy.

### EXERCISE 29.7 Revising: Semicolons

Insert semicolons in the following paragraph wherever they are needed. Eliminate any misused or needless semicolons, substituting other punctuation as appropriate. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

The set, sounds, and actors in the movie captured the essence of horror films. The set was ideal; dark, deserted streets, trees dipping their branches over the sidewalks, mist hugging the ground and creeping up to meet the trees, looming shadows of unlighted, turreted houses. The sounds, too, were appropriate, especially terrifying was the hard, hollow sound of footsteps echoing throughout the film. But the best feature of the movie was its actors; all of them tall, pale, and thin to the point of emaciation. With one exception, they were dressed uniformly in gray and had gray hair. The exception was an actress

who dressed only in black; as if to set off her pale yellow, nearly white, long hair; the only color in the film. The glinting black eyes of another actor stole almost every scene, indeed, they were the source of all the film's mischief.

**Note** See page 488 for a punctuation exercise combining semicolons with other marks of punctuation.

## **Commas, semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses**

(For explanations, consult the pages in parentheses.)

### **v Sentences with two main clauses**

The bus stopped, but no one got off. (p. 432)

The bus stopped; no one got off. (p. 453)

The bus stopped; however, no one got off. (p. 455)

The mechanic replaced the battery, the distributor cap, and the starter; but still the car would not start. (p. 457)

Her duty was clear: she had to locate the problem. (p. 477)

### **v Introductory elements**

Modifiers (p. 433)

After the argument was over, we laughed at ourselves.

Racing over the plain, the gazelle escaped the lion.

To dance in the contest, he had to tape his knee.

Suddenly, the door flew open.

With 125 passengers aboard, the plane was half full.

In 1983 he won the Nobel Prize.

Absolute phrases (p. 440)

Its wing broken, the bird hopped around on the ground.

### **v Interrupting and concluding elements**

Nonessential modifiers (p. 435)

Jim's car, which barely runs, has been impounded.

We consulted the dean, who had promised to help us.

The boy, like his sister, wants to be a pilot.

They moved across the desert, shielding their eyes from the sun.

The men do not speak to each other, although they share a car.

Nonessential appositives

Bergen's only daughter, Candice, became an actress. (p. 437)

The residents of three counties—Suffolk, Springfield, and Morrison—were urged to evacuate. (p. 480)

Father demanded one promise: that we not lie to him. (p. 477)

Essential modifiers (p. 436)

The car that hit mine was uninsured.

We consulted a teacher who had promised to help us.

The boy in the black hat is my cousin.

They were surprised to find the desert teeming with life.

The men do not speak to each other because they are feuding.

Essential appositives (p. 438)

Shaw's play *Saint Joan* was performed last year.

Their sons Tony, William, and Steve all chose military careers, leaving only Matthew to run the family business.

Transitional or parenthetical expressions

We suspect, however, that he will not come. (p. 438)

Jessica is respected by many people—including me. (p. 480)

George Balanchine (1904–83) was a brilliant choreographer of classical ballet. (p. 482)



Absolute phrases (p. 440)

The bird, its wing broken, hopped about on the ground.  
The bird hopped about on the ground, its wing broken.

Phrases expressing contrast (p. 441)

The humidity, not just the heat, gives me headaches.  
My headaches are caused by the humidity, not just the heat.

Concluding summaries and explanations

The movie opened to bad notices: the characters were judged shallow and unrealistic. (p. 477)  
We dined on gumbo and jambalaya—a Cajun feast. (p. 480)

v **Items in a series**

Three or more items

Chimpanzees, gorillas, orangutans, and gibbons are all apes. (p. 441)  
The cities singled out for praise were Birmingham, Alabama; Lincoln, Nebraska; Austin, Texas; and Troy, New York. (p. 457)

Two or more adjectives before a noun (p. 442)

Dingy, smelly clothes decorated their room.  
Dessert consisted of one tiny scoop of ice cream.

Introductory series (p. 480)

Appropriateness, accuracy, and necessity—these criteria should govern your selection of words.

Concluding series

Every word should be appropriate, accurate, and necessary. (p. 448)  
Every word should meet three criteria: appropriateness, accuracy, and necessity. (p. 477)  
Pay attention to your words—to their appropriateness, their accuracy, and their necessity. (p. 480)  
<http://www.ablongman.com/littlebrown>

Visit the companion Web site for more help and an additional exercise on end punctuation.  
<http://www.ablongman.com/littlebrown>

Visit the companion Web site for more help and additional exercises on the comma.

### Principal uses of the comma

- v **Separate main clauses linked by a coordinating conjunction** (next page):

|                    |   |                   |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| <b>Main clause</b> | , | <i>for and or</i> | <b>main clause</b> | . |
|                    |   | <i>so but nor</i> |                    |   |
|                    |   | <i>yet</i>        |                    |   |

The building is finished, but it has no tenants.

- v **Set off most introductory elements** (p. 433):

|                                 |   |                    |   |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|---|
| <b>Introductory<br/>element</b> | , | <b>main clause</b> | . |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|---|

Unfortunately, the only tenant pulled out.

- v **Set off nonessential elements** (p. 435):

|                    |   |                                 |   |
|--------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Main clause</b> | , | <b>nonessential<br/>element</b> | . |
|--------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|

The empty building symbolizes a weak local economy, which affects everyone.

|                                     |   |                                 |   |                               |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Beginning of<br/>main clause</b> | , | <b>nonessential<br/>element</b> | , | <b>end of<br/>main clause</b> | . |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|

The primary cause, the decline of local industry, is not news.

- v **Separate items in a series** (p. 441):

|     |               |   |               |   |            |               |     |
|-----|---------------|---|---------------|---|------------|---------------|-----|
| ... | <b>item 1</b> | , | <b>item 2</b> | , | <i>and</i> | <b>item 3</b> | ... |
|     |               |   |               |   | <i>or</i>  |               |     |

The city needs healthier businesses, new schools, and improved housing.

- v **Separate coordinate adjectives** (p. 442):

|     |                            |   |                             |   |                          |     |
|-----|----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|-----|
| ... | <b>first<br/>adjective</b> | , | <b>second<br/>adjective</b> | , | <b>word<br/>modified</b> | ... |
|-----|----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|-----|

A tall, sleek skyscraper is not needed.

#### Other uses of the comma:

- Set off absolute phrases (p. 440).
- Set off phrases expressing contrast (p. 441).
- Separate parts of dates, addresses, long numbers (p. 443).
- Separate quotations and signal phrases (p. 444).
- Prevent misreading (p. 447).

See also page 448 for when *not* to use the comma.

### A test for essential and nonessential elements

1. **Identify the element.**

Hai Nguyen who emigrated from Vietnam lives in Denver.  
Those who emigrated with him live elsewhere.

2. **Remove the element. Does the fundamental meaning of the sentence change?**

Hai Nguyen lives in Denver. *No*.  
Those live elsewhere. *Yes*. [Who are *Those*?]

3. If *no*, the element is *nonessential* and should be set off with punctuation.

Hai Nguyen, who emigrated from Vietnam, lives in Denver.

**If yes, the element is *essential* and should *not* be set off with punctuation.**

Those who emigrated with him live elsewhere.

### **Punctuating two or more adjectives**

1. **Identify the adjectives.**

She was a faithful sincere friend.

They are dedicated medical students.

2. **Can the adjectives be reversed without changing meaning?**

She was a sincere faithful friend. *Yes*.

They are medical dedicated students. *No*.

3. **Can the word *and* be inserted between the adjectives without changing meaning?**

She was a faithful and sincere friend. *Yes*.

They are dedicated and medical students. *No*.

4. **If yes to both questions, the adjectives *are* coordinate and *should* be separated by a comma.**

She was a faithful, sincere friend.

**If no to both questions, the adjectives are *not* coordinate and *should not* be separated by a comma.**

They are dedicated medical students.

### **Principal misuses of the comma**

- v **Don't use a comma after a subject or verb:**

Faulty    Anyone with breathing problems, should not exercise during smog alerts.

Revised   Anyone with breathing problems should not exercise during smog alerts.

- v **Don't separate a pair of words, phrases, or subordinate clauses joined by *and*, *or*, or *nor*:**

Faulty    Asthmatics are affected by ozone, and sulfur oxides.

Revised   Asthmatics are affected by ozone and sulfur oxides.

- v **Don't use a comma after *and*, *but*, *although*, *because*, or another conjunction:**

Faulty    Smog is dangerous and, sometimes even fatal.

Revised   Smog is dangerous and sometimes even fatal.

- v **Don't set off essential elements:**

Faulty    Even people, who are healthy, should be careful.

Revised   Even people who are healthy should be careful.

Faulty    Bruce Springsteen's song, "Born in the USA," became an an-them.

Revised   Bruce Springsteen's song "Born in the USA" became an an-them.

- v **Don't set off a series:**

Faulty Cars, factories, and even bakeries, contribute to smog.

Revised Cars, factories, and even bakeries contribute to smog.

v **Don't set off an indirect quotation:**

Faulty Experts say, that the pollutant ozone is especially damaging.

Revised Experts say that the pollutant ozone is especially damaging.

<http://www.ablongman.com/littlebrown>

Visit the companion Web site for more help and additional exercises on the semicolon.

**Distinguishing the comma, the semicolon,  
and the colon**

**The *comma* chiefly separates both equal and unequal sentence elements.**

- √ It separates main clauses when they are linked by a coordinating conjunction (p. 432):

An airline once tried to boost sales by advertising the tense alertness of its crews, but nervous fliers did not want to hear about pilots' sweaty palms.

- √ It separates subordinate information that is part of or attached to a main clause, such as an introductory element or a nonessential modifier (pp. 433, 435):

Although the airline campaign failed, many advertising agencies, including some clever ones, copied its underlying message.

**The *semicolon* chiefly separates equal and balanced sentence elements. Often the first clause creates an expectation, and the second clause fulfills the expectation.**

- √ It separates complementary main clauses that are *not* linked by a coordinating conjunction (previous page):

The airline campaign had highlighted only half the story; the other half was buried in the copy.

- √ It separates complementary main clauses that are related by a conjunctive adverb or other transitional expression (opposite):

The campaign should not have stressed the pilots' insecurity; instead, the campaign should have stressed the improved performance resulting from that insecurity.

**The *colon* chiefly separates unequal sentence elements.**

- √ It separates a main clause from a following explanation or summary, which may or may not be a main clause (pp. 477–78):

Many successful advertising campaigns have used this message: the anxious seller is harder working and smarter than the competitor.