

17 RULES TO WRITE BY¹

Punctuation	Rule	Example	Explanation
Comma ,	<p>Introductory phrases: Commas are used to mark the end of an introductory clause and are followed by a complete sentence. Introductory clauses often begin with words such as <i>although</i>, <i>when</i>, <i>while</i>, <i>since</i>, <i>if</i>, and <i>because</i>.</p> <p>(Yes. The word <i>because</i> can start a sentence!)</p>	<p><i>When it stops raining, Jim is going to wash his car.</i></p> <p><i>Although I'd love to go to the movie with you, I need to study for the ACT.</i></p>	<p>Please notice that each phrase is followed by a comma and then a complete sentence. Also, <u>the subject of the sentence must be mentioned immediately</u> after the comma in order for the sentence to make sense.</p>
		<p><i>Feeling very sad, she felt a tear run down her cheek.</i></p>	<p>This is correct because it is clear that “she” was feeling very sad. If the sentence were written, “Feeling very sad, a tear ran down her cheek,” it would be incorrect. A tear can’t feel sad!</p>
	Your Turn!		
	<p>Afterthoughts: A comma can be used at the end of a sentence followed by an afterthought.</p>	<p><i>The football game was a massacre, forty-nine to zero.</i></p>	<p>Using a comma before an afterthought enhances clarity by signaling that the additional information is supplementary. While sometimes optional, especially in informal contexts, including the comma is a good practice to ensure your writing is easily understood.</p>

¹ Giovannini, J. D. (2023). ACT success: Skills and strategies for mastering the ACT. Academic Tutoring, LLC. 5-7.

Comma ,	Your Turn!		
	Interruptions/Appositives: Commas are used to set off nonrestrictive clauses/appositives (phrases that interrupt the flow of the sentence). Words such as <i>however, for example, for instance, and though</i> are usually surrounded by commas.	<i>David, a generous young man, volunteers his time to worthy causes.</i>	To check for interruptions, remove the words between the commas. If the remaining portion is a complete sentence and the meaning has not changed, then the commas are correct. If not, then test another answer. <u>Be sure to read the whole sentence!</u>
	Your Turn!		
	A comma with a conjunction = a period: A comma before a conjunction can be used to separate two complete sentences. (Conjunctions are <i>and, or, for, so, but, yet.</i>)	<i>Football season is about to begin, and I hope the Chicago Bears win.</i>	Do not use a comma without the conjunction to separate two complete sentences!
	Your Turn!		
	Coordinate Adjectives: Commas are used to separate two or more adjectives preceding a noun. Basically, if you can substitute the word <i>and</i> for the comma, the comma is needed.	<i>The ACT is a stressful, difficult test.</i> <i>The man wore a dark blue sweater.</i>	Do not use a comma if the first adjective describes the second (often referred to as cumulative adjectives). (Dark describes the type of blue.)

Comma ,	Your Turn!		
	<i>Lists:</i> Commas separate more than two words in a series/list.	<i>I like listening to country, rock, blues, and jazz music.</i>	The last comma after “blues” is optional (though the ACT tends to leave it in for clarity).
	Your Turn!		
Dash —	<i>Interruptions/Appositives:</i> The dash, like a comma, is used to mark an interruption.	<i>The Chicago Triathlon—a race of endurance, strength, and skill—is difficult to complete.</i>	Two dashes or two commas can be used interchangeably; however, never use one of each.
	Your Turn!		
	<i>Afterthoughts:</i> The dash can also be used to stress a word or phrase at the end of a sentence.	<i>Danny’s sense of humor is unlike anyone else’s in the family—sarcastic and intelligent.</i>	Notice that the dash is used to give extra information. It makes the description “sarcastic and intelligent” stand out more clearly and adds emphasis.
	Your Turn!		
	<i>Between two complete sentences:</i> The semicolon is used to separate complete sentences.	<i>Shannon works hard for her family; she wants to provide them with everything they need.</i>	The semicolon is used to separate complete sentences that are closely related in thought because they could stand alone as independent

Semicolon ; Basically, a fancy period!			sentences. It creates a smoother, more connected pause than a period.
	Your Turn!		
	Semicolon ; <i>Between conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases:</i> Conjunctive adverbs are words like <i>however, therefore, & indeed</i> . Transitional phrases are groups of words like <i>for example, in other words, & as a result</i> .	<i>I enjoy cooking; however, I don't like cleaning.</i> <i>The ACT is tomorrow morning; as a result, I am not going out tonight.</i>	Semicolons are used before conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases to connect two closely related independent clauses. They help clarify the relationship between the ideas while maintaining proper sentence structure.
Colon :	Your Turn!		
	<i>Complete sentences and then a list:</i> Use a colon after a complete sentence followed by a list.	<i>I have many hobbies: golfing, running, biking, and cooking.</i>	A colon is used after a complete sentence followed by a list to signal that what comes next explains, illustrates, or expands on the sentence before it. It prepares the reader for specific details that support the main idea.
	<i>Complete sentence and an afterthought:</i> Use a colon at the end of a complete sentence followed by an afterthought.	<i>Japan has a high literacy rate: 99 percent.</i>	A colon is used at the end of a complete sentence to introduce an afterthought or example that directly relates to the main clause. It signals to the reader

Colon :			that what follows will expand on or clarify the idea just presented.
	Your Turn!		
	<i>Two complete sentences:</i> The colon is also used to separate two complete sentences when the second sentence explains or restates an idea in the first.	<i>Families are complicated: sometimes it's easier to be closer with friends.</i>	The colon is used in this sentence to introduce an explanation or elaboration of the idea before it. The first part—"Families are complicated"—is a general statement, and the second part—"sometimes it's easier to be closer with friends"—explains or expands on <i>why</i> families might be complicated. The colon signals that what follows will clarify or illustrate the first part.
	Your Turn!		
Apostrophe , a.k.a ownership	<i>Singular possession:</i> If there is one owner, use <u>'s</u> .	<i>Roxanne's ballroom gown is brand new.</i>	Use <u>'s</u> to show possession when there is <i>one owner</i> because it clearly indicates that something belongs to that single person or thing. For example, <i>Roxanne's ballroom gown</i> means the gown belongs only to Roxanne.
	Your Turn!		

Apostrophe ,	Plural possession: If there is more than one owner, use <u>s</u> '.	<i>Ten boys' bikes were stolen.</i>	Most plural nouns already end in "s", so adding just an apostrophe makes the word easier to read and say. If we added another <u>s</u> , it would sound awkward (like "boys's"), which is not how English is typically spoken.
	Your Turn!		
	Irregular plurals: Words that are plural without adding the "s" (women, men, people, children, etc.) form the possessive by adding <u>s</u> .	<i>The women's soccer team won the World Cup.</i>	In English, the possessive form is typically created by adding an apostrophe + <u>s</u> ('s) to a noun, even if that noun is irregular or plural. This rule holds true for words like <i>women</i> , <i>men</i> , <i>children</i> , and <i>people</i> , despite their irregular plural forms.
	Your Turn!		
Parentheses ()	Parentheses: Use parentheses to mark an interruption.	<i>I have a dog named Jake (a funny little Corgi) who goes to work with me every day.</i>	The parentheses in this sentence are used to provide additional information about Jake, describing him as "a funny little Corgi," without interrupting the main sentence. This extra detail adds context or elaboration but is not essential to the core meaning of the sentence.
	Your Turn!		