

Punctuation Patterns

Periods

Use a period to end a sentence. Make sure the sentence is grammatically complete before you end it with a period, or you will create a sentence fragment.

- **Correct:** Some TikToker from Brazil started this hilarious trend.
- **Incorrect:** Some TikToker from Brazil. Started this hilarious trend.

If you would like to know more about the grammatical definition of a sentence so you can place periods properly, see our handout "What Is a Sentence?"

Also, use periods according to convention in various abbreviations.

- Dr. Alvarez will check on the E. coli patient at 9:00 a.m.

Semicolons

A semicolon joins two independent clauses (simple sentences) together.

- I am a morning person; my partner is a night owl.

A semicolon also connects two independent clauses with a transition word followed by a comma.

- I am a morning person; **however**, my partner is a night owl.

For more transition words, see our handout "Transitional Devices." For more on independent clauses, see our handout "What Is a Sentence?"

Commas

Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*) to connect two independent clauses together.

- Winter is too cold, **and** summer is too hot.

Inserting a little extra information into a sentence requires commas as well.

- Groundhogs, which are not actually hogs, are also known as "whistlepigs."

Also use commas to set up dialogue or quotations in your text.

- Ingrid asked, "Did you buy milk?"
- "I forgot," Araceli answered with a shrug.
- "I see," Ingrid said after a long pause, "so I'm just supposed to eat my cereal dry then?"

Commas also connect dependent clauses to the independent clauses they rely on, but only if the dependent clause comes first.

- Because I passed English 101, I can take English 102.

A dependent clause might look like a sentence, but it isn't. It **depends** on an independent clause to complete it. For more on dependent clauses, see our handouts "Fixing Sentence Fragments" and "What Is a Sentence?"

For much more on commas, see our handout "Using Commas."

Colons

A colon comes at the end of an independent clause and tells the reader a list is coming.

- There are so many genres of punk fiction: steampunk, cyberpunk, dieselpunk, atompunk, biopunk, clockpunk, aetherpunk, and more!

Similarly, a colon can also tell a reader that what follows will "expand or clarify" the preceding statement (Fogarty 118).

- English is weird: you'd think "good" and "mood" would rhyme, but they don't.
- There's one thing a truly curious person always wonders about: everything.

Additional Information

This handout lists just a few of the patterns for punctuation. For a complete list, consult a style guide, ask a writing consultant, or visit the [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#). Here's the QR code for that last one:



Punctuation patterns are not something you can learn in one sitting. Getting comfortable with them will take practice, so seek out resources and give yourself some time to learn the basics!

Work Cited

Fogarty, Mignon. *Grammar Girl Presents the Ultimate Writing Guide for Students*. Illustrated by Erwin Haya. St. Martin's Griffin, 2011.

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