

Understanding the Pesky Rules of Punctuation

The Suspicious Semicolon [;]

- 1. A semicolon is used to connect two related independent clauses.**
John went to the store to buy groceries; he forgot the list.
- 2. It is preferable to use an introductory word after the semicolon to connect the two clauses.**
John went to the store to buy groceries; however, he forgot the list.
- 3. Use a semicolon to separate units of a series when one or more of the units contain commas.**
During my summer vacation I traveled to Louisville, Kentucky; St. Louis, Missouri; Orlando, Florida; and Atlanta, Georgia.
- 4. Use the semicolon between two sentences joined by a coordinating conjunction when one or more commas appear in the first sentence.**
After reading the book, I was able to understand the movie; and I am now able to analyze the characters.

The Complicated Colon [:]

- 1. Use a colon after a complete sentence that introduces a list and does not use an introductory word.**
To bake the cake I need the following ingredients: oil, chocolate chips, and eggs.
- 2. Capitalization and punctuation are optional when using single words or phrases in bulleted form. If each bullet or numbered point is a complete sentence, capitalize the first word and end each sentence with proper ending punctuation. Remember to be consistent!**
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For the research project, each group member must complete their specific directions:
(a) Sharon needs to state the hypothesis.
(b) Mike has to locate the variables.
(c) Allison must write the research report.

- 3. Use a colon instead of a semicolon between two sentences when the second sentence explains or illustrates the first sentence and no coordinating conjunction is being used to connect the sentences. If only one sentence follows the colon, do not capitalize the first word of the new sentence. If two or more sentences follow the colon, capitalize the first word of each sentence following.**

I love reading: Jane Austen is my favorite author.

Running is good for your health: It decreases your risk of heart disease. It also helps to lower your cholesterol.

- 4. A colon is used before a block quote within a paper.**

Dr. Zay serves as a mouthpiece for the dawning of this social movement when she, in a moment of rare personal exposure, declares to Yorke her personal motivation as a female doctor:

Until recently it needed force rather than fineness to bring a woman to the surface of a great progressive movement. We are coming to a point where both are to be absolutely necessary to success in the art of healing. A union of these qualities will be demanded of women, because they are women, such as had never been expected of men, or perhaps been possible to them. We have a complex task before us. (165)

- 5. The Colon is also used after a salutation in a business or formal letter/e-mail.**

Dear Dr. Dennis Kinlaw:

The Dubious Dash [—]

- 1. The En Dash: Roughly the width of an *n*, it is a little longer than a hyphen. It is used for periods of time when you might otherwise use *to*.**

I went to the College of William and Mary from 2003–2007.

- 2. The En Dash is also used when combining open compounds.**

The condo is situated on the Pennsylvania–Delaware border.

- 3. The Em Dash: It is the width of an *m*. Use an em dash sparingly in formal writing. In informal writing, em dashes may replace commas, semicolons, colons, and parentheses to indicate added emphasis, an interruption, or an abrupt change of thought.**

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps was the first author—the only author—who used the hybridized genre form.

I wish I could—oh, forget about it.

Sarah cleaned the house—Charles painted the walls.

Quirky Quotation Marks:

- 1. Punctuation always goes inside the quotation mark.**
While Elizabeth Stuart Phelps is accused of being “overly sentimental,” she is actually an innovative author.
- 2. When replacing a pronoun in a quotation, do not include the original word.**
“She was unknown during her life but made famous after death.”
“[Emily Dickinson] was unknown during her life but made famous after death.”
- 3. When using MLA citation, the period is placed after the parenthetical citation.**
Andover, Massachusetts became a city greatly and most particularly affected by this “far-reaching, long-lasting, grass-roots movement” (Shiels 223).
- 4. Use a single quotation mark for a quote within a quote.**
“She looked happy but then suddenly started screaming, ‘I hate you!’”
- 5. Use quotations for short works of fiction: short stories, poems, reviews, articles, editorials.**
My favorite poem is Poe’s “The Raven.”

Add the necessary punctuation:

Last semester I studied abroad it was the best experience of my life. Before leaving for my trip I packed several essential items my passport maps of Europe and plenty of Euros. I went to Paris France Berlin Germany and Florence Italy. I learned how to speak France however I did not know any Italian. On my way to Florence we stopped in Chamonix on the France Italy border. I enjoyed the food in Italy the pasta was my favorite dish. The cultural aspects of each country were completely unique likewise each country gave me a totally different feel for Europe. During my trip I read poetry from each country my favorite poem was To Paris I Go I have so many incredible pictures and souvenirs but nothing can fully capture the beauty I witnessed. When trying to capture and describe my trip, I am always reminded of a quote by Freya Stark Travel does what good novelists also do to the life of everyday, placing it like a picture in a frame or a gem in its setting, so that the intrinsic qualities are made more clear. Travel does this with the very stuff that everyday life is made of, giving to it the sharp contour and meaning of art.

http://www.grammarbook.com/english_rules.asp

<http://www.bravenewtraveler.com/2008/03/07/50-most-inspiring-travel-quotes-of-all-time/>

<http://www.hindsc.edu/Documents/Departments/English/MLA%20Punctuation%20Guide.pdf>