

# REFERENCE SHEET ON PUNCTUATION AND CAPITALIZATION

## PUNCTUATION

### **THE PERIOD.** Use the period:

1. To end a statement, mild command, or indirect question.  
EXAMPLES: The semester is more than half over.  
Their vacation home was simple, yet it provided respite from the daily concerns.  
The strike is over.
2. To end a mild command.  
EXAMPLES: Join me for a cup of coffee.  
Come with me to the park.  
Begin at the top of page 4.
3. To end an indirect question.  
EXAMPLES: She wondered if the critic had attended the same performance as she had.  
She asked why I chose that representative for the board.  
Dedicated musicians eventually stop asking why they have to practice.
4. With most abbreviations.  
Address designations: Bailey Square—Bailey Sq., Third Avenue—Third Ave., First Street—First St.  
Forms of address and university degrees: Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., M.D., B.A., Ph.D.  
Time: B.C., A.D., a.m., p.m.  
Other: e.g., i.e., p.  
Note: If a sentence ends with an abbreviation, use only one period.  
Abbreviations for organizations, corporations, and government agencies usually do not use periods: IBM, IRS, USMC.  
Pronounceable acronyms (formed by the initial letters of the name) do not need periods: UNESCO, WHO, VISTA.

### **THE COMMA.** Use the comma:

1. To separate words, phrases, and clauses in a series.  
EXAMPLES: His vision, strength of character, and enterprise have brought about great changes.  
Here is a woman who will plan her work, who will execute the plans, and who will go far.
2. To separate parts of a date or address and to set the date or address off from the rest of the sentence.  
EXAMPLES: On March 6, 1978, Helen and Joe arrived.  
At Dallas, Texas, we were delayed.
3. To separate a short question from a statement when the question is dependent upon the statement for its meaning.  
EXAMPLES: It was Paul who bought the radio, wasn't it?  
You planned to start early, hadn't you?
4. To set off words of direct address.  
EXAMPLES: "Ann, can you type this paper?"  
"No, Joe, someone else will have to type it."
5. To set off the name of the speaker from a direct quotation.  
EXAMPLE: "I hate to go home without any fish," said Jim, "but today the fish just aren't biting."
6. To separate two adjectives modifying the same noun equally if the adjectives could be joined by a conjunction. Adjectives should not be separated with a comma when the one nearer the

noun is more closely related to the noun.

EXAMPLE: A tall, thin figure appeared in the doorway. (The figure was tall and thin.)

7. To set off introductory verbal phrases modifying the subject of the sentence.

EXAMPLES: Driving carefully over the slippery pavement, we finally reached our house.  
(participle)  
After unpacking the car, we took it to the garage. (prepositional phrase)  
To advance in the profession, one must work hard. (infinitive)

8. To separate the main clauses in a compound sentence.

EXAMPLE: We finished our homework, and we listened to records for the rest of the evening.

9. To set off an adverb clause at the first of a sentence.

EXAMPLE: When I finished the assignment, I walked to the front of the room and turned it in.  
Note: Adverb clauses appearing at the end of the sentence do not need commas.

10. To set off introductory prepositional phrases if they are lengthy, if several phrases are used together, or if the comma is needed for clarity. A single prepositional phrase at the beginning of a sentence does not usually require a comma.

EXAMPLES: At the beginning of the year 1950, they set off for their trip.  
In 1950 they set off for their trip.

11. To set off parenthetical expressions.

EXAMPLES: He has, we understand, been very successful.  
You are, however, very fortunate to obtain the position.  
He is, to tell the truth, unable to meet the obligation.

12. To set off adjectives that follow the noun they modify.

EXAMPLE: The child, carefree and happy, wandered into the forest.

13. To set off contrasting expressions from the rest of the sentence.

EXAMPLE: It was John's attitude, not inefficiency, that lost him the job.

14. To set off an appositive from the rest of the sentence.

EXAMPLE: George Powers, a former football star, gave a talk.

15. To set off nonrestrictive adjective clauses from the rest of the sentence.

EXAMPLE: The boy, who is my friend, will come to visit us.

**THE SEMICOLON.** A semicolon is used:

1. Before such words and expressions (conjunctive adverbs—adverbs that join) as **however, then, thus, so, hence, in fact, in truth, that is, therefore**, etc., that join related independent clauses.

EXAMPLE: My brother has lived many years in the West; therefore, I understand his attitude.  
Note: The conjunctive adverb is preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma.

2. Between two independent clauses when the conjunction is not expressed.

EXAMPLE: Alice looked at the letter for a long time; it was illegible.

**THE COLON.** A colon is used:

1. To introduce lists. The words **these, as follows, and the following** are frequently used to introduce a list.

EXAMPLE: You are asked to bring the following: sandwiches, pickles, cake, and lemonade.

2. To follow the salutation in a business letter.

EXAMPLE: Dear Mr. Andrews:

3. To introduce a quotation with a complete sentence.

EXAMPLES: He quoted this proverb: "The rain falls on the just and the unjust."

This was her favorite quotation: "Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again..."

**THE DASH.** A dash may be used:

1. To set off a series of appositives.

EXAMPLE: A number of the flowers—daisies, larkspurs, lilies, and roses—were in bloom on Memorial Day.

2. Before a summary of preceding details in a sentence.

EXAMPLE: June, July, August—These are the usual vacation months.

3. To show an unexpected or abrupt change in thought or structure of a sentence.

EXAMPLE: Grace inherited a fortune—at least that is what we heard—from her uncle in California.

4. To make an appositive more emphatic.

EXAMPLE: There was only one possible means of entrance—the window in the coal bin.

**ITALICS.** Italics are used:

1. To indicate complete publications, such as titles of books, magazines, plays, newspapers, movies, ships, planes, trains, etc.

EXAMPLES: We saw *Gone With the Wind* yesterday.

The *Queen Mary* just docked.

2. To designate words when spoken of as words.

EXAMPLE: The word *iron* has an unusual history.

3. To emphasize a word or phrase. (Use sparingly.)

EXAMPLE: I'm betting she's going to *be* somebody.

**QUOTATION MARKS.** Quotation marks are used:

1. To enclose a direct quotation.

EXAMPLE: "You can't do that," he shouted.

2. To set off titles of stories, articles, chapters, poems, essays, works of art, and radio and television programs.

EXAMPLES: We read "To Build a Fire" in English class.

Did you watch "All in the Family" last night?

3. To draw special attention to or set off a word or expression.

EXAMPLE: She described him as being "cute."

**THE HYPHEN.** A hyphen is used:

1. In writing fractions and in all numbers from 21 to 99.

EXAMPLES: two-thirds, forty-five

2. To separate the parts of a compound word.

EXAMPLE: self-control

3. Between the words of a group of words taking the place of a single adjective before a noun.  
 EXAMPLES: The student consulted an up-to-date dictionary.  
 It was a well-documented report.
4. Between a prefix and a proper noun or adjective.  
 EXAMPLE: She is neither un-American nor pro-German.
5. With the prefixes **all-**, **self-**, **ex-** when they mean "former" and sometimes between a prefix ending in a vowel and a root beginning with the same vowel.  
 EXAMPLES: God is all-knowing and all-powerful.  
 They liked the candidate's self-possession.  
 The ex-champ was dining with her ex-husband.  
 He entered the contest as the anti-intellectual candidate.

**PARENTHESES.** Parentheses are used to enclose a side remark or a parenthetical expression. Sometimes this is an appositive.

EXAMPLES: Beside this stream (we were camping here at the time) we unearthed an Indian skeleton.

Note: No capital letter is needed. Unless "?" or "!" is needed, do not use end punctuation.

My typewriter (a Remington portable) has been restored.

**THE APOSTROPHE.** An apostrophe is used:

1. To indicate possession.
  - a. If the noun is singular, add an apostrophe and s.  
 EXAMPLE: boy—boy's
  - b. If the noun is plural ending in s, add an apostrophe only.  
 EXAMPLE: boys—boys'
  - c. If the noun is plural, but does not end in s, add an apostrophe and an s.  
 EXAMPLE: women—women's
2. To represent omitted letters in contractions and omitted numbers in year designations but not to indicate plural dates or eras.  
 EXAMPLES: I will—I'll, should have—should've, you are—you're, did not—didn't, could not—couldn't  
 FY '04 (2004), Spring '97 (1997)  
 Note: Be sure the omitted letters are clearly understood from the context of what is written.  
 '60s, 1970s
3. To form plurals of numbers and single letters.  
 EXAMPLES: She has four A's on her report card.  
 There were four 3's on the board.

## CAPITALIZATION

**CAPITALS.** Use capitals with

1. The first word of every sentence, most lines of poetry, or direct quotation.  
 EXAMPLE: Lydia said, "My lawn doesn't need mowing."
2. Proper nouns, proper adjectives, and titles that precede a name.  
 EXAMPLES: Judge Jones, Uncle James, Chinese food
3. All sacred names, such as the *Bible*, and all of its parts, the names of all religious sects, and the names of churches.  
 EXAMPLES: We found the quotation in the *Old Testament* in the book of "Job": "Follow the Christ, the King..."  
 "I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields."

4. The months, the days of the week, and all holidays.  
EXAMPLES: **Memorial Day**, **Monday**, the fourth of **June**, the **Fourth** of **July**  
Note: The seasons are not capitalized.
5. The words **north**, **south**, **east**, and **west** when they refer to a part of the country, but not when they refer to a direction.  
EXAMPLES: The company feels that the **Northwest** offers greater opportunities than the **East**.  
We were driving **east**.
6. Special events, historical eras, and geographical areas.  
EXAMPLES: the **Spanish-American War**, the **Louisiana Purchase**, the **Boston Tea Party**, the **Victorian Era**
7. The names of special buildings, organizations, and companies.  
EXAMPLES: **Travelers Insurance Company**, the **Woolworth Building**, **Rotary Club**
8. The titles of books, documents, stories, poems, musical works, art works, and plays.  
Capitalize all words in titles except prepositions, conjunctions, and the articles **a**, **an**, and **the** except when the first word in a title.  
EXAMPLES: *The Story of **Bermuda***, "**On Carrying a Cane**"  
Note: Prepositions of more than four letters are frequently capitalized.  
"**Journey Through Brooklyn**"  
*The **Tempest***
9. The word "president" when it refers to the President of the United States.  
EXAMPLE: The **President** vetoed the bill.
10. The names and abbreviations of educational degrees.  
EXAMPLES: **Master of Science—M.S.**, **Bachelor of Arts—B.A.**, **Doctor of Philosophy—Ph.D.**
11. The names of all races and nationalities.  
EXAMPLES: **Indian** costumes, **French** soldiers, **Mexican** food
12. Mother and Father unless they are preceded by **my**, **his**, **yours**, etc.  
EXAMPLES: I knew **Father** would coach the team.  
I knew that my father would coach the team.
13. All languages.  
EXAMPLES: **Spanish**, **English**, **Latin**, **Russian**
14. School subjects that are languages or that have numbers after them. Do not capitalize other subjects.  
EXAMPLES: He is taking **Russian**.  
I plan to take algebra and art.  
I plan to take **Algebra I** and **Art II**.