

## Summary of Punctuation and Capitalization Rules

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### Period

1. At the end of declarative and imperative sentences:  
Declarative (a statement): The book is on the desk.  
Imperative (a command): Go to the grocery store and buy milk.
2. In abbreviations:  
Ed Wilson, Ph.D. will be lecturing about insects.  
Ms. Audrey Aimes is an award-winning photographer.
3. As elements of ellipses, which indicate omitted words:  
Just before he lost consciousness, the victim whispered, "Help me . . ."
4. Inside quotation marks:  
The determined scientist thought to himself, "I must find a solution."

### Quotation Marks

1. Around the *exact words* of a speaker:  
The teacher said, "We will have an exam next Tuesday."
2. Around titles of songs, short articles or essays, stories, poems:  
Nancy quoted from the article "Lost Heroes" in her research paper.
3. When using quotation marks within a quotation, use *single* quotation marks:  
Tony asked Nancy, "Can I read 'Lost heroes' when you are finished using it?"

### Question Mark

1. At the end of a direct question, but not when the sentence is not a direct question:  
Do you know the way to San Jose?  
David asked me if I knew the way to San Jose?
2. Within parentheses:  
Aristotle died in A.D. 600 (?).
3. With quotation marks:  
Inside the quotation marks only when the question mark is part of the quoted text:  
I asked, "May I borrow a pencil?"  
Outside the quotation marks when the question mark is *not* part of the quoted text:  
Do you know the meaning of the word "juxtaposition"?

### Semicolon

1. In place of a comma and a conjunction to join independent clauses:  
I'm not hungry; he wants to eat a big lunch.
2. Before a conjunctive adverb (like *however* or *therefore*):  
I want to transfer to UCLA or USC; therefore, I need to get good grades at LBCC.
3. Between items in a list when the list items have commas:  
Three movies I have seen recently are *Jaws*, about a killer shark off the coast of New

England; *K-19*, about a Russian submarine; and *Pod People*, about a little boy who makes friends with an alien.

### **Colon**

1. Before a series or list that follows a complete sentence (do not use a colon in the middle of a sentence):

To lose weight, you should do the following: exercise regularly, eat healthy foods, and drink less alcohol.

2. When introducing a quotation after a complete sentence:

Remember the words of the great Yogi Berra: "It ain't over until it's over."

3. In a salutation of a formal letter:

To Whom It May Concern: (Salutations in less formal letters tend to have commas.)

4. Between hours and minutes and between minutes and seconds of time:

The space shuttle lifted off at exactly 11:40:29 this morning.

5. Before an appositive, explanation, or example that follows a complete sentence:

In the history of major league baseball, two teams have played in Seattle: the Pilots (1969 only) and the Mariners (1977-present).

6. Between main clauses when the first signals that the second will provide an answer or definition:

Faith is like love: It cannot be forced.

7. In proportions:

The ratio of students to teachers was 30:2.

### **Dash (two hyphens together)**

1. Around a sudden break in thought:

In 1991, the Minnesota Twins—what a season Jack Morris had that year!—won the World Series in seven games. (When the interrupting thought ends the sentence, the second dash is replaced by end punctuation, such as a period.)

2. To introduce a summary or explanation:

The Cincinnati Reds won the 1990 National League pennant by going "wire-to-wire"—they were in first place for the entire season.

3. To indicate a hesitation or other awkwardness in speech:

After losing the game, one of the players stammered, "I just—I just cannot believe it. We tried so hard."

4. To set off information that deserves emphasis:

Johnny ate the whole jar of peanut butter—the whole jar!

### **Comma**

1. Between main clauses with a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):

The movie was terrible, and the audience was making fun of it.

2. Between individual items in a series or list:

Remember to buy milk, butter, eggs, bread, and juice.

3. After names in a direct address:  
Joe, will you please pass the butter?
4. After introductory expressions:  
Unfortunately, I only had a 2.5 GPA last semester.
5. Around appositives (a word or phrase that renames or defines a preceding noun):  
Barry Bonds, the best home run hitter in baseball, is left-handed.
6. After an introductory dependent clause:  
After she had worked at the company for six years, she decided she hated her job.
7. Before *such as* when it is followed by an example or a list:  
Read a good book, such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.
8. Around a thrown-in interrupting expression (*However, I think, After all, etc*):  
Bill Clinton is, in my opinion, a terrible role model.
9. Around non-limiting (non-restrictive, non-essential) clauses, phrases, or information:  
Mulberries, which happen to be my least favorite berry, are expensive this year.
10. With quotations:  
Sigmund Freud asked, "What do women want?"
11. Between elements in locations, dates, or addresses:  
My father was born on December 31, 1953, in the morning. (Do not use commas if the date is inverted—17 March 2004—or if it does not include the day.)
12. After introductory verbals or verbal phrases:  
Sleeping soundly, Linda did not wake up when the earthquake hit.
13. Before and after an element that contrasts with a previous element:  
Now that I have a good job, I get paid a better salary, not minimum wage.

### **Hyphen**

1. In the middle of compound words:  
My great-grandmother's name was Mary.  
Two-year-olds often get into trouble.
2. Between two words functioning as a single adjective before a noun:  
Ross Perot was not a well-known political figure before 1992.  
The game-show contestant missed a terribly obvious question.
3. In the middle of compound numbers and fractions:  
He claims that he caught twenty-four trout while fishing in one day.  
One-third of my paycheck goes to pay for my rent.
4. With some prefixes and suffixes:  
Larry King has several ex-wives.  
The president-elect must wait almost three months to be sworn in.  
Maria is a self-motivated woman.  
Many cultures believe in an all-knowing deity.

### **Apostrophe**

1. In possessives, between the end of the word and s when the word does not end in s; but after the s in words ending in s:

That is Andy's jar of pickles.

That is the Taylors' house.

2. In contractions, to signify where letters have been omitted:  
The bad guys in movies sometimes aren't very smart. (The *o* in *not* has been left out.)
3. Before the *s* in plurals of letters, numbers, and words.  
Dr. Yenser gave six A's, three B's, nine C's, and two D's in his literature class.

### **Italics**

1. For foreign words not accepted in common usage in English:  
The citizens staged a *coup d'etat* and overthrew the dictator.
2. For emphasis:  
After Lisa got home, her mother said, "I said *not* to take the car!"
3. For titles of larger works (books, magazines, movies, albums/CDs)  
Have you ever read *The Great Gatsby*?  
The Beatles released their album *Rubber Soul* on December 3, 1965.
4. For words that are mentioned rather than used in normal speech or writing:  
The word *egg* comes from the Danish language.

### **Capitalization**

1. For proper nouns and adjectives derived from them:  
Many people from Vietnamese descent live in Los Angeles.
2. For generic names with a proper noun:  
The college is located on Carson Street.
3. For the first word in a sentence:  
Did you leave the oven on when you left the house?
4. For the pronoun I:  
Even if I wanted to, I could not ski.
5. For the title of a relative when the relative is named:  
That blonde woman is Aunt Delia.
6. For titles that precede a proper name (but not when a name is not given):  
That man in the blue suit is President Barack Obama.  
My doctor is Doctor Moore.  
My friend is a professor of English.
7. For words in titles (except coordinating conjunctions, articles, and prepositions):  
*Lord of the Rings* is one of my favorite movies.
8. For races and ethnic groups:  
My friend Laurie married a Nigerian last year.
9. For historical, religious, or political groups:  
Many Catholics tend to consider themselves Republicans.
10. For points on the compass:  
The hurricane traveled NW toward the Florida coast.
11. For specific course titles:  
I took Renaissance Literature last semester.

12. For seasons only if they refer to semesters or issues of magazines:  
Jim plans to enroll at Yale in the Fall 2005 semester.
13. For formal systems, organized departments, etc.:  
Most personal computers have Windows installed on them.  
The English Department has some great instructors.
14. For the first word of a complete sentence in parentheses:  
She was nearly hit in the head. (Of course, she never knew.)
15. For names and abbreviations of associations, clubs, and organizations:  
The Kiwanis Club meets once a month.
16. For sacred names:  
The Bible is a very important book for Christians.
17. For directions when they are used as specific geographic places:  
Have you ever visited the Northeast?  
I have only been to New York City and Boston.