

Punctuation Cheat Sheet

Commas

Use a comma after an introductory element--a word, a phrase, or a clause that comes before the main clause. To test to see whether you need a comma, simply cover up what you consider to be the introductory element. If a complete sentence follows, you need a comma. Below are some examples:

Introductory Words:

Yes, she is my sister.

Well, I don't believe a word he says.

However, he tells a good story.

Introductory Phrases: (does not contain a verb in the introductory element)

At one time, I believed what he said.

In just a minute, I will return your papers.

As a matter of fact, I am sometimes gullible.

Introductory Clauses: (contains a verb in the introductory element)

If you will listen, I will explain the situation.

Although she is short, she appears tall.

Unless I am mistaken, that man was here yesterday.

NOTE: However can be an introductory word, but although cannot.

Conjunction Comma:

Use a comma before a conjunction (FANBOYS) if it has a complete thought before and after it.

I understand the material, yet I failed the test.

The boy is a thief, and his sister is a prostitute.

She will not attend class, nor will she study.

Interrupting Commas (essential and nonessential appositives):

Use a comma to set off an interrupting element--one that you can leave out of the sentence without changing the meaning. However, do not abuse this rule. Make sure the element is not just a modifier.

John, who is my cousin, won the race.

He has, in fact, won several races.

My favorite teacher, a woman named Mrs. Smith, died.

Semicolons

You won't ever have trouble with semicolons if you remember that they are simply fancy periods. Semicolons indicate a closer connection between two ideas or clauses than periods do. It just depends on how you want it to sound. Try it both ways, and see which one you like better.

I really enjoyed the book; however, it was difficult.

Adam isn't simply a good man; he is a saint.

I have to attend a lecture tonight; therefore, I must leave early.

She was speeding on a wet road; as a result, she had a serious accident.

The following words/phrases require a semicolon when they connect two complete sentences:

consequently
nevertheless
on the contrary
furthermore
thus
instead
however
then
next

Colons

A colon introduces a list or an explanation. Remember that a complete sentence must precede a colon.

I bought three things: paper, a pen, and ink.

She has one main flaw: greed.

Our lives consist of several doorways: education, career choices, marriage, and parenthood.

A colon can also separate two complete sentences if the second sentence explains the first one:

Jack is a truly evil man: he would even abuse his own mother.

Cather in the Rye is my favorite book: there is a little Holden Caulfield in all of us.