

Punctuation Rules and Practice

Commas

- Separate two independent clauses when joined by FANBOYS: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*
The parking lot was full, so the bus had to park on the side of the road.
- Separate two or more adjectives that modify the *same* noun
The large, brown owl appeared to be asleep on the branch of the oak tree.
- Set off *non-essential* expressions
In the boardroom, the department managers were meeting to discuss strategies.
The managers, as well as the director, met in the boardroom to discuss layoffs.
- Separate three or more items in a series—*unless* they are all joined by *and* or *or*
The briefcase contained papers, a camera, and a small red box.

Semicolons

- Use *instead* of commas in sentences that list items in a series when the items contain *internal* commas.
Wilma has friends in Paris, France; London, England; and Red Deer, Alberta.
- Use *instead* of a FANBOYS + comma in a compound sentence
A boy found the briefcase lying in a ditch, so he picked it up and looked inside.
A boy found the briefcase lying in a ditch; he picked it up and looked inside.

Colons

- Use a colon after a statement that introduces a directly related idea:
 - A list
 - A definition
 - An explanation
 - A word, phrase, or clause used for emphasis
 - A quotation
 - A rule
 - Etc.

Practice Exercises

Commas

1. The book is easy to read and it provides excellent information about recycling.
2. Many people recycle regularly but many others do not bother.
3. Some people were concerned about the amount of waste on campus so a committee was set up to encourage people to recycle.
4. The author has created a long intricate story with many sub-plots and characters.
5. The most unique interesting character in the story is certainly Molly Jones.
6. While the story is based on historical events it is certainly more fiction than fact.
7. By reading one chapter a day aloud the teacher keeps us interested in the story.
8. The author who has written several other books does not go on speaking tours.
9. Understandably the publishers which want authors to tour are not very pleased.
10. The story contains mystery romance and action.
11. The heroine is beautiful intelligent funny and rich.
12. The villain however is ugly poor and of questionable morality.

Semicolons

An agreement was made between the Community Options Society which provided personnel the Family Life Society which provided a place to meet and the Ministry of Families and Children which provided funds.

The children played in the water which was very cold made sand castles and ran on the beach.

James Hammond has worked for this company for twenty-five years he has been a loyal and productive employee.

The company rewarded James's efforts by giving him a large bonus he was completely surprised and very pleased.

Jennie is a very productive worker however she does not expect everyone else to work to the same standard.

The meeting last night went on until midnight therefore the staff did not come to work until noon today.

Colons

Please bring the following items to class pen, pencil, paper, and books.

Please bring the following items to class (a) pen, (b) pencil, (c) paper, and (d) books.

I don't like rules, but this one is very important smoking is not permitted in or around the building.

Jim gave two reasons for his lateness time and money.

Sara has a new pet a hedgehog.

Here are the words of Chief Seattle "The earth does not belong to us. We belong to the earth."