

## *Punctuation Matters*

### *1. Apostrophes*

#### *a. Contractions*

#### *b. Possessive in Nouns*

These are the usual uses of the apostrophe today. You'll recognize the apostrophe in contractions. I've just used two, and you'll note that the common contractions are of subject-verb combinations of the personal pronouns and the verb *to be* or *to have*. Other common contractions are of a verb and *not*. We sometimes contract a verb phrase as well.

I am = I'm

You are = you're

He is = he's

She is = she's

It is = it's

Who is = who's

That is = that's

We are = we're

They are = they're

I will/I shall = I'll

You will/you shall = you'll

He will/he shall = he'll

She will/she shall = she'll

Who will/who shall = who'll

We will/we shall = we'll

They will/they shall = they'll

I have = I've

You have = you've

He has = he's

She has = she's

It has = it's

Who has = who's

We have = we've

They have = they've

Who have = who've

I had = I'd

You had = you'd

He had = he'd

She had = she'd

Who had = who'd

We had = We'd

They had = they'd

is not = isn't

was not = wasn't

will not = won't

does not = doesn't

did not = didn't

has not = hasn't

had not = hadn't

can not = can't

are not = aren't

were not = weren't

do not = don't

have not = haven't

could not = couldn't  
would not = wouldn't  
should not = shouldn't

could have = could've  
would have = would've  
should have = should've

there is = there's  
there has = there's

Note that pronouns change *case*—from *subjective* to *objective* to *possessive*—through a spelling change rather than through punctuation.

Subjects	
I	We
You	
He/she/it	They
Who	

  

Objects	
Me	Us
Him/her	Them
Whom	

  

Possessives	
My/mine	Our/ours
Your/yours	
His/her/hers/its	Their/theirs
Whose	

When we form the possessive case for nouns, we add an ending to a singular or plural form of the noun. The *number* (singular or plural) form is the first thing determined:

1 child	2 children
1 boy	2 boys
1 lady	2 ladies
1 man	2 men

Each of these can be made plural by adding 's or, if the word already ends in s, by adding only an apostrophe:

1 child's toy	several children's toys
1 boy's cap	three boys' caps
1 lady's hat	all the ladies' hats
1 man's suit	two men's suits

2. **Commas**

- a. ***In dates***
- b. ***In place names***
- c. ***In series***
- d. ***Before and after interrupting elements***
- e. ***After introductory words, phrases, or clauses***
- f. ***Before information unnecessary for identification (participial phrases or clauses)***
- g. ***Between clauses***

Use a comma between the day of the month and the year when the month is written first:

April 14, 2004

If the sentence continues after the date, place a comma after the year as well:

The sale will begin on April 14, 2004, and will continue through April 18.

Do not use a comma between the month and the year:

April 2004

14 April 2004

When you use a city and state or city and country to identify a location, place a comma between them. If your sentence continues after the naming of the location, place a comma after the state or country as well.

They flew to San Antonio, Texas, and from there drove to Houston.

They visited Milan, Italy, to research family history.

The handbooks for academic writing tell us that a comma should be placed after every item in a series of three or more except the last one, even if they are joined by *and*. You will notice that journalistic style (generally following the AP Style Guide) does not use a comma before the *and* in a series.

Tom, Dick, Jane, and Fred are cousins.

She enjoys camping, fishing, and hunting.

Harry is bright, handsome, and rich.

We budgeted for paper, staplers and extra staples, paper clips, a three-hole punch, pens, pencils, and lined tablets.

An adverbial word or phrase that can be removed from the sentence without damaging its grammatical structure, or syntax, should be preceded and followed by commas.

We were later than we expected to be and, in fact, very tired.

I overslept and, consequently, missed my bus.

She reads rapidly. I do not, though.

A group of adverbs that are sometimes called *conjunctive adverbs* follow this rule. Often, they occur at the beginning of a sentence and are sometimes mistakenly considered to be *conjunctions*. The difference, though, is that a conjunction cannot be moved around in the sentence while an adverb can.

She reads rapidly. However, I do not.	<i>Conjunctive adverb</i>
She reads rapidly. I, however, do not.	<i>Conjunctive adverb</i>
She reads rapidly. I do not, however.	<i>Conjunctive adverb</i>
She reads rapidly, but I do not.	<i>Conjunction</i>
Although she reads rapidly, I do not.	<i>Conjunction</i>

Note that the conjunctive adverb is separated from the rest of the sentence, wherever it appears, but that the conjunctions are not separated with commas from the clauses in which they appear. Another rule, discussed below, governs the *compound* sentence that connects ideas with *but*.

One reason that it's useful to be able to identify the subjects and verbs in a sentence is that introductory words, phrases, or clauses (coming before the main subject and verb of the sentence) are followed with a comma.

First, a transitional word may begin a sentence.

For example, a prepositional phrase may begin a sentence. As a matter of fact, we often see two interdependent prepositional phrases treated as a single introductory element: *of fact* is a prepositional phrase necessary to communicate the meaning of *matter*, which in turn is the object of a preposition and, hence, is part of a prepositional phrase.

When we start a sentence with a dependent clause like this one, a comma is needed between it and the main clause.

In many sentences, phrases or clauses say something about one noun, pronoun, or noun phrase, but the information is not necessary to the sentence. If the information *is* necessary, no comma is used; if the information is unnecessary, a comma is used.

I checked my bank balance with the woman who helped me balance my checkbook last week.

(The clause *who helped me balance my checkbook last week* is necessary information to identify what *woman* is being referred to. Therefore, there is no comma between *woman* and the following clause.)

I checked my bank balance with the head teller, who helped me balance my checkbook last week.

(In this case, we could end the sentence at *the head teller* and know who was being referred to. The clause contains information that's interesting but not necessary to understanding the meaning of the main clause. Therefore, a comma separates *teller* from the following clause.)

Many other sentences, such as those using prepositional phrases or appositive noun phrases, could be used to illustrate this principle.

My aunt, an active 87-year-old churchgoer and an inveterate shopper, finds it frustrating to be ill.

Ending a sentence with a preposition, according to Mrs. Johnson, is perfectly acceptable.

Commas are used between independent clauses, clauses that can stand by themselves as sentences, when they are joined with coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, so, yet, or, for, nor*).

Mrs. Freedman is a Southern Baptist, and she believes that dancing and playing cards are perfectly acceptable activities.

[Mrs. Freedman is a Southern Baptist. She believes that dancing and playing cards are perfectly acceptable activities.]

Sam was depressed, but he went to the party anyway.

[Sam was depressed. He went to the party anyway.]

Harry Potter is denied permission to go on outings to Hogsmeade, so he must use his invisibility cloak and a magical map to find his way there in secret.

[Harry Potter is denied permission to go on outings to Hogsmeade. He must use his invisibility cloak and a magical map to find his way there in secret.]

Mrs. George isn't any good at teaching grammar, yet she won't give a grade higher than a C on any student essay with three grammatical mistakes.

[Mrs. George isn't any good at teaching grammar. She won't give a grade higher than a C on any student essay with three grammatical mistakes.]

Two independent clauses may be joined by a semicolon without a coordinating conjunction. If a coordinating conjunction is used to join them, a comma rather than a semicolon is the appropriate punctuation mark.

#### *A Note about Conjunctions:*

*Subordinating conjunctions* belong to the clauses (or phrases) they head:

*When* it rains

*Wherever* you go

*If* you give a mouse a cookie

*Because* I love you

*Although* the deadline has passed

Because one of these conjunctions sets up a relationship between the clause it heads and another clause that will complete the idea, the presence of the subordinating conjunction makes the clause a *dependent clause* (because it depends on that other, independent clause to complete its meaning).

*Coordinating conjunctions* join two equivalent clauses (or phrases), as shown in the examples above. Each may stand as a complete sentence, and therefore each is an independent clause.

#### *A Note about Relative Clauses:*

Clauses that begin with a *relative pronoun* (*who/whose/whom; which; that; whoever/whomever*) or a prepositional phrase that has a relative pronoun as the object of the preposition (*in which, for which, of which, to which, in whom, for whom, of whom, to whom, etc.*) or a prepositional phrase that uses the possessive form of the relative pronoun to modify the object of the preposition (e.g., *in*

*whose care*) are dependent clauses. Relative clauses are distinguishable from interrogative clauses, or sentences, in many cases by the form of the verb and its placement relative to the subject of the clause.

The coat *which Jerry wore to the restaurant* was spotted with gravy stains when the waitress dropped her tray beside his chair.

*Which coat did Jerry wear?*

I met the woman *whom the committee interviewed for the job*.

*Whom did the committee interview for the job?*

I met the woman *who applied for the job*.

*Who applied for the job?*

Relative clauses may also begin with *relative adverbs* (e.g., *where, why, when*).

We haven't yet decided *where we'll go on vacation this summer*.

No, I can't give you a good reason *why you should stop biting your nails*, but you're driving me crazy!

The day *when we met* is engraved upon my memory.

#### *Other Dependent Clauses:*

Nominal clauses (clauses that function as nouns in the sentence) are dependent clauses.

*That Betty should stop smoking immediately* is something we all agree on.

Fred saw *what he was meant to see*.

I never knew *how sweetly Colleen could sing*.

We couldn't decide *where we should go for lunch*.

#### *Some Notes about Sentence Boundary Errors (Fragments, Run-on Sentences, Comma Splices, and Fused Sentences):*

A *dependent clause* that is punctuated as a sentence is a *fragment*.

~~*Whom we met last night.*~~

A phrase (without a subject and verb) that is punctuated as a sentence is a *fragment*.

~~*Especially late at night.*~~

~~*For example, Chinese food or Thai food.*~~

A single sentence comprised of two or more *independent clauses* that are joined with a comma without a coordinating conjunction is a *comma splice*.

~~*Sarah is running for class president, she has a good chance of being elected.*~~

If the same sentence lacks a comma, it may be identified as a *fused sentence*.

~~*Sarah is running for class president she has a good chance of being elected.*~~

Either a comma splice or a fused sentence may be identified as a *run-on sentence* because it fails to observe standard rules for sentence boundaries. A very long sentence, with or without comma splicing or fusing, may sometimes be referred to as a run-on sentence.

*Types of Sentences as Defined by Types of Clauses:*

*Simple sentence:* one independent clause

*Compound sentence:* two or more independent clauses

*Complex sentence:* one independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses

*Compound-complex sentence:* two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses

## *Pronoun Cases*

Pronouns change case as well as number through spelling changes.

### *Subjective Case*

I	we
you	you
he, she, it	they

### *Objective Case*

me	us
you	you
him, her, it	them

### *Possessive Case*

my, mine	our, ours
your, yours	your, yours
his, her, hers, its	their, theirs

### *Subjective Case*

who, whoever

### *Objective Case*

whom, whomever

### *Possessive Case*

whose

### *Subjective Case*

you all

### *Objective Case*

you all

### *Possessive Case*

you all's