

PUNCTUATION, APA STYLE

Spacing

Each mark of punctuation is followed by one space. (Two spaces may follow a period ending a sentence; however, if used the practice should be consistent throughout the paper.)

Exceptions No space is required after

- opening parenthesis:
↓
Departing flights (except those already noted) are temporarily grounded.
- opening quotation mark, and comma or period before a closing quotation mark
↓ ↓
The captain remarked, "The space is inadequate." I agreed.

All other punctuation marks are followed by one space.

Apostrophe (')

1. to show ownership or possession.

Add an apostrophe and an s ('s) to words that don't end with an s:

somebody's car (the car belonging to somebody)
the men's locker room (the locker room of the men)
a month's rent (the rent of a month)

Add only an apostrophe after the s to words that already end in s.

twelve days' pay (that is, the pay for twelve days)
the students' tests (that is, tests belonging to the students)

2. to form contractions.

Show omission of letters with apostrophes:

Could not = couldn't; he is = he's; they are = they're; cannot = can't

Colon (:

1. Use a colon after a complete sentence that introduces a list.

↓
The breakfast menu contained the clients' favorite foods: bran muffins, bananas, pancakes and maple syrup, and bacon and eggs.

If the introduction is not a complete sentence, no punctuation is needed:

↓
Dieters preferred low fat breakfast foods such as strawberries, unbuttered whole wheat toast, unsweetened cereal, and applesauce.

2. Use a colon on the reference list, to separate publisher location from name.

↓
Hebring, R. J., Jr. & Vang, C. (2002). *Collective wisdom, diverse experience: Managers' real stories* (3rd ed.). New York: Random House

Comma (,) See separate section on commas at end of Punctuation section.

Dash (--) and Hyphen (-)

Use dashes to separate words and phrases. Type dashes by using two hyphens (or em dashes) with no space between them, or between them and the words they separate. Use dashes to indicate an interruption:

Students in the third group—those who received no training—were least successful at accomplishing the task).

Hyphens are used to connect words and parts of words. Type hyphens with no space before or after (e.g., step-by-step instructions).

Parentheses ()

In academic writing use parentheses to (a) enclose citation material, and (b) enclose letters used for lists, as in this sentence. They are also used (but sparingly) to enclose words or phrases that are not essential, as in the sentence you are reading.

Quotation Marks (" ")

In academic writing use quotation marks to enclose direct, word-for-word passages borrowed from another source.

Commas and periods that finish quotes are always placed inside quotation marks.

Other marks of punctuation are placed outside quotation marks unless they are part of the quoted material.

Semicolon (;)

1. between two sentences when a period is not desired.

Sales of buttons and tee shirts were higher than expected; few people bought flags, however.

2. to separate elements in a series if the elements themselves contain commas.

↓ ↓
Commission membership included Janet Dubois, mayor; Arun Ramish, city attorney; Tyreesha Tomlin, school board president; and Harold Rosen, state representative.

Six Comma Rules

The following six comma rules will enable you to punctuate most sentences correctly.

1. Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, so*, yet, nor, for) if it joins two sentences.

- Ellen thought the movie was exciting, and Fred liked it more than any he had seen that year.
- Fred and Ellen saw a movie and went out to dinner afterwards. (No comma needed because and is not joining two sentences.)

* (when so means *therefore* or *as a result*, but not when it means *so that*)

2. Use a comma after introductory expressions.

An introductory expression is a word or words that lead up to the main part of the sentence.

- Frankly, I have had enough of this cold and rainy weather.
- When our bakery closed down, Jan had to make her own bread.
- Confused by the freeway signs, Ralph got hopelessly lost in Chicago.

3. Use commas to separate three or more items in a series.

Use a comma after each item, including the one before the conjunction (and or or).

- Protestors wore black pants, red shirts, and green sashes.
- Students can study before class, after school, or on Saturday afternoon.

4. Use commas to set off words and phrases that interrupt the sentence if those words are not essential to the purpose of the sentence.

- Michelle took her seat at the table and, much to everyone's surprise, blew her nose on the tablecloth.
- I liked Brad's sense of humor. His lewd jokes, however, deeply embarrassed his grandmother.
- Bill, a man of much courage, grabbed the burglar's hand and bit off his trigger finger.

5. Use a comma to set off a phrase at the end of a sentence if that phrase refers to the beginning or middle part of the sentence, or to the entire sentence. These phrases will usually begin with a word ending in -ed or -ing.

- Teachers offered rewards to the students, trying to improve their test scores.

With a comma, the sentence means that teachers offered rewards in an attempt to improve test scores. (The phrase *in an attempt to improve test scores* might better be placed after *teachers* and set off with commas.)

- Teachers offered rewards to the students trying to improve their test scores.

Without a comma, the sentence means that teachers offered rewards only to students who were trying to improve their test scores.

6. If rules 1-5 don't apply, you probably don't need a comma. Most people over-use commas.

Exception. Occasionally, a comma is needed to prevent the misreading of a sentence, even if one of the five rules doesn't apply. Note the following example:

Patients who can discuss side effects with their doctors before undergoing surgery.

Adding a comma will prevent misreading of the sentence:

Patients who can, discuss side effects with their doctors before undergoing surgery.