Mechanics, Punctuation, Prepositions & Conjunctions

Whitebook Series

Mechanics, Punctuation, Prepositions & Conjunctions

Walton Mendelson

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walton@12on14.com

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Mechanics, Punctuation, Prepositions & Conjunctions

Mechanics & Punctuation

In the following, there are many alternatives. Some, such as words used as words, can be indicated with quotation marks or italics. To keep your reader from being confused, be consistent: if you use first use italics, continue using italics. Whereas, other marks that also have overlapping uses, such as setting off parentheticals (with commas, parentheses, and em dashes), can be varied. These variations should be consistent as well, but they are not as quantifiable. For example, commas could be used for fairly close parentheticals, parentheses for slightly more distant ones, and em dashes for abrupt or very distant interruptions. These choices could also be based on the visual clarification that certain marks provide on the page.

When the impulse to use type effects (italics, semibold, bold) or punctuation in idiosyncratic ways begins to tease the writer, the response should be to resist. The informality of emails often admits variations of emphasis—all caps, bold, bold all caps, one to innumerable exclamation marks. How does the reader assess "Stop!" from "Stop!!!" or "STOP!": this is where the writer should exercise his writing skills to show his impending heart attack—not to indicate it with a blizzard of exclamation marks. If the writer must succumb to a spasm of individuality he should be utterly scrupulous in applying his invention so the reader knows and trusts in his intent.

These rules are not universally accepted. Where a rule is obscure, unlikely to be needed and mentioned only in old sources, I have not included it. Where a rule is contradicted—for example, *Chicago Manual of Style* versus Garner's *Modern American Usage* concerning four ellipsis points; Garner makes much more sense—I have chosen the more reasonable.

British rules of punctuation—and spelling—differ from American rules. Because most of us in need of a quick confirmation of where a mark goes are apt to glance at a reference page: including these differences is likely to cause more harm than good.

Writing for most college courses is guided by the MLA. Specific disciplines—psychology APA, medical AMA, journalists NYT or AP guides. If your writing is to be governed by a specific guide, the following is not for you; and many publishers have their own house style.

Most people will agree with most of the following. And sometimes there are no easy answers to a problem, or if an author just wants to do something differently. But to repeat what is probably the most important rule: have a reason for what you do and do it consistently.

ITALICS

Foreign words—foreign words that are likely to be unfamiliar:

- *beau geste*
- *bon vivant*
- *schadenfreude*
- *sine qua non*

  —but not familiar words: rodeo, mea culpa, aria, mesquite

Titles—books, magazines, newspapers, plays, long poems, movies, works of art:

- *Moby Dick* (book)

—religious foundational works, the Bible, the Koran, etc., are capitalized but not italicized
—short stories, are not italicized: "Heart of Darkness," "The Raven"

- *Scientific American* (magazine)
  —articles are not italicized: "Everglades in Peril "
- *The Wall Street Journal* (newspaper)
- *The Doll's House* (play)
  —monologues and short skits are not italicized: "I'm Herbert"
- *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (long poem)
  —short poems are not italicized: "The Raven"
- *The Last Supper, The Thinker* (art works)

Words used as words—references to a word itself as a word:

- The word *effect* is often misused.

Emphasis—a word or phrase can be italicized to emphasize it: however, it is best avoided:[1]

- Miss Whitehouse[2] was adamant, "*Never* use italics."

Special terminology or usage—key terms, terms with special meanings, terms to which the reader should be directed (where the usage is consistent the term is generally italicized on its first use only):

- As we shall see, *sociali-sm* meant something quite different to utopian writers than to someone like Engels, let alone Lenin. When Engels wrote about socialism, he meant . . .

Indirect quotes—indirect quotes, thoughts, and reminiscences are sometimes put in italics. While this is generally considered a misuse, it appears in contemporary fiction.

- *Will she never stop talking*, David thought.

Misuses—do not use italics to indicate a direct quote.

CAPITALIZATION

Declarative Sentences—begin with a capital letter:

- Today is the first day of May.
  —short parenthetical sentence are not italicized: Today is the first of May (it's my birthday), and we're having a party.

Poetry—every line of poetry should begin with a capital, unless it was written without capitalization.

- As learned commentators view
  In Homer more than Homer knew.
  —Jonathan Swift (from *On Poetry: a Rhapsody*)

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1 To be avoided not because it is wrong, but because it is easily abused. In fiction writing, in particular, it is easy to over use italics to tell or indicate, when showing is generally more effective. One common strategy is to put the punch word at the end, as we put the punch line at the end of a joke. Use italics if *needed*.

2 Miss Whitehouse was an English teacher at my high school. She was ill-suited to teach honors English, but looking back, I think she meant well. She was most comfortable within the dogmatic embrace of Latinate grammar. With apologies to her, she is my straw man here—sorry, straw person.

- he was a handsome man

  and what I want to know is

  how do you like your blueeyed boy

  Mister Death

  —e.e. cummings (from *Buffalo Bill's*)

Quotations—the first word of a direct quotation:

- Miss Whitehouse said, "Follow all the rules."

Formal Statements—or resolutions:

- The board hereby resolves, That some rules are meant to be broken.

Proper Nouns—and derivatives:

- Boston/Bostonian
- America/American
- Thomas Hobbs/Hobbsian
- Karl Marx/Marxism
- Lake Erie (when a common noun is part of a proper name)
  —whereas: lakes Erie and Ontario
- Painting 201: Introduction to Figurative Painting (a specific name of a course)
  —but, painting: I am taking Pollock's painting class.)
- Federal Trade Commission (proper)
  — but: federal court, federal judge (common)
- General Motors (proper)
  —but: our company makes cars (common)
- Mom, Dad, Uncle: I gave it to Mom. (Where a proper name can be substituted: as "I gave it to Sue.")
  —but: Is you mom going to be there? (Where a proper name cannot be substituted: as "Is your Sue going to be there?")
- I
  —but he, she, or it

Epithets and Fictitious Names:

- the Sun King
- the Great Emancipator
- Babe Ruth
- John Doe
- Jane Doe

Months, holidays, days of the week:

- November (but: fall, summer, or month)
- Memorial Day (but: my birthday)
- Tuesday (but: the twelfth of the month falls on . . .)

Personal Titles—commonly, titles are capitalized when they are used as part of a proper name, but not when they sand alone:

- Painting 201 is being taught by Professor David Jones. (
  —but: The professor for John's painting class said . . . ; or John is a doctor.

Personal Titles—optional for important figures (the preference seems to be to capitalize):
- The President vetoed the bill; or, the president vetoed the bill.

Events—Important events:
- Battle of the Bulge
- World War I
- Kentucky Derby (and: the Derby)
- World Series (and: the Series)

East, West, North, South—as specific parts of the country:
- The East was hit hard by the a severe hurricane. (but: If you go east, you get to N.Y.)
- The Northeast was hit by a storm. (but: If you drive northeast, you'll get to Maine.)

God—references God, Allah, Jesus, or Mohammed, etc.:
- Moses said, "I know He looks over all the people of the land."

Abbreviations—many abbreviations are capitalized (not all abbreviations require periods—CIA, FBI, FTC):

titles before a proper name: Dr., Mrs., Gov.
- Dr. Smith

titles after a proper name: jr. (junior), corp. (corporation), ph.d.
- Tom Jones, Sr. , or Mr. Tom Jones, Sr.; (full name)
  —but not: Mr. Jones, Sr.
- General Motors Corp.
- Lawrence Rawlings, Ph.D.

numbered addresses: rd. (road), ave. (avenue)
- The White House is at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
  —not: He lives on the ave. off the square.

dates or numerals:
- 33 B.C.
- 10:45 A.M.
  —not: This a.m. I had a meeting.
- room No. 13
  —not: What is the no. of your room?

Initials of a person's name:
- J. D. Salinger

Ellipsis: after an omission if the next part begins with a capital:
- Now we are engaged in a great civil war . . . We are met on a great battle-field of that war.

Emphasis: in most prose, often viewed as old fashioned:
- He was thus a Bad King.
- What a piece of work is Man. (Where a name stands for an entire class.)

Titles: for the titles of books, articles, songs, titles of lectures, works of art, etc.:

Principal words—nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs—are capitalized.

Minor words—articles, prepositions, conjunctions—are not capitalized unless they are the first or last word of the title.

Hyphenated words—if a capitalized word (principal word) is hyphenated, the second part or element is capitalized unless it is a short preposition, conjunction, or aritcle.[3]

- *Enligh-Speaking*
- *Two-Thirds*
- *Anti-Intellectual*
- *Up-to-Date*
- *Under-the-Counter*

SYLLABICATION (see also HYPHEN)

End-of-line Hyphenation—words should not be broken at the ends of lines unless absolutely necessary, this is most often necessary in justified text. The hyphen is used at the end of a line, not the beginning of the next, to break a word:

A word should be divided according to pronunciation, usually, by syllables:

- knowl-edge (not know-ledge)
- democ-racy (not demo-cracy)
- aim-ing (but not: aimed)

Double consonants are normally divided unless they represent a single sound:

- din-ner
- sum-mit
- moth-er
  —not: mot-her

Compound words (whether spelled solid or hyphenated) are broken into their components:

- book-case
- type-writer
- court-martial
  —not: court-mar-tial)
- clearing-house
  —not: clear-inghouse)

Prefexes and suffixes are treated as separate syllables, except *-ed*:

- trans-action
- pro-visional
- chang-ing
- danc-ing

Proper names are best not divided, breaking after the initials is permissible, never between the initials:

- E. B. White
- E. B.-White
  —not: E.-B. White)

3 *Chicago Manual of Style* differs here: would not capitalize the second word if 1) the first element were a prefex that cannot stand on its own (*anti, pre,* etc.); or 2) if the second element were a spelled out number: thus, Two-thirds and Anit-intellectual.

Avoid breaking last names:
- John-son

Never divide a word so that a single letter ends a line:
- a-lone

Figures should be kept together, breaking after a comma is permissible:
- $2,725,000
- $2,725,-000

  —not: $2,725,0-00

Avoid end-of-line hyphens with a page turn

NUMBERS

Exact numbers—less than one hundred, or one or two words, are spelled out:
- thirty students
- 897 students

Consistency—numbers in the same category should be treated alike within a paragraph should be treated the same:
- Of the 435 representative, only 17 voted against the bill, and 56 abstained.

Figures—generally, figures are acceptable for (see **Special Cases**):

Dates:
- January 23, 1989, 33 B.C., A.D. 1061

Addresses:
- 17 Miller Valley, 59 East 17nd Street

Percentages:
- 55 percent

Fraction, decimals:
- ¾, 0.75

Time of day:
- 4:05 P.M.

Identification numbers:
- ISBN 0-123-45678-9

Parts of a book or play:
- figure 22, table 9, Act II, scene 2

Exact amounts of money:
- $1,714

Initial numbers—initial numbers are written out (if the number is very large, reconstruct the sentence so it is not at the beginning):
- Fifty-five percent of the students were close to failing last spring.
- Nineteen seventy-five was an exceptionally wet year in Cleveland.

Compound numbers—in numbers less than a hundred, hyphens are used:
- thirty-one (but: one hundred thirty-one)

Large numbers—large, round numbers can be expressed in number and units:

- $2.7 trillion
- 6.1 billion years

Special Cases:

Scientific usage (mathematical, technical, statistical, physical quantities—distance, areas, pressures, etc.) are expressed in figures:
- 27 miles
- 120 volts
- 10 ounces
- 73.2° F

Nonscientific usage—follow the rules governing the spelling out of numbers, see above; except fractional quantities, which are cumbersome to write out, and should be expressed as figures:
- 8½ x 11 paper

Abbreviations—if an abbreviation for the unit of measure is used, the quantity is expressed as a number:
- 27 mi.
- 120 v.
- 73.2° F

Decimals & Percentages—decimals and percentages are generally set in percentages. In scientific writing use "%"; in general writing use "percent":
- The interest rate is 17 percent.
- The study showed a positive correlation of 23%.

BLOCK QUOTES

If quoted material—not dialogue—is longer than four or five lines, roughly fifty words, it should be set off by indenting the quote, sometimes the type and leading are reduced too. Often this material can be quite long, thus the use of the ellipsis is often found here, see Ellipsis, page 144; also:

Paragraphs—1) the opening line of the first paragraph normally follows the original; it is not preceded with an ellipses, even if it does not start with the first sentence, unless it itself has omitted words at its beginning; 2) to indicate an omitted paragraph(s), use a spaced out spaced out ellipses between the quoted paragraphs; 3) following the first quoted paragraph, internal paragraphing should follow the original; 4) an ellipsis does not end quote, unless the last part of the last sentence is omitted:

- An easy, perhaps facile definition of punctuation . . . . the growth of printed books following Gutenberg and metal movable type printing in the mid-1400s.

  . . .

  In the centuries on either side of Gutenberg, rhetoric and logic were central to any good education: and the educated seemed not to need, or want, the clarifying nature of punctuation. . . . So there might have been a pull . . . towards clarification. . . .

  . . .

> . . . . to a large extent, typesetters were responsible for the development and use of punctuation.

Lead-in—the problem with block quotes is that too often the reader will not read them. “The Senator called me a liar, here’s the letter to prove it:”—who is going to read it? The skilled writer will use a lead-in, which might include part of the quote, or not. The idea is to lead the reader into the quote naturally:

- We forget how we learned to read and how separate it was from talking. But in fact, the written word cannot “reproduce the spoken word”:

> . . . listen to a gifted orator and ask how? The printed word can do little more than repeat the words, and suggest the meaning. For one thing, your words are frozen in place, with no opportunity to see the glazed look in your reader’s eyes and adjust your story to make it more interesting, or to explain why something is important to him.

Emphasis—see Square Brackets, page 147

Poetry—although several lines of poetry may be quoted in line, poems are often quoted centered on the page, reproducing as closely as possible the original alignment. Although not a block quote, this treatment, like block quotes, sets the quoted material apart from the basic text:

- ’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
and the mome raths outgrabe.

Misuse—do not put block quotes in quotation marks or italics, unless the original material is itself in quotation marks or italics. Because this would otherwise be a mistake, for clarity, it would be appropriate to add a comment, for example: [italics in original].

Punctuation

An easy, perhaps facile, definition of punctuation is that it is the written version of gesture, inflection, facial expression, and body language in the spoken word. It cues the reader: to slow down, to pause, to look for relationships between things and ideas. At one time in Romance languages, there were very few punctuation marks, no capitalization, spaces, or periods. Although there are examples of punctuation going back to the ancient Greeks, the development and codification of punctuation as we know it, parallels the growth of printed books following Gutenberg and metal movable type printing in the mid-1400s.

There is no way that the written word can reproduce the spoken word—listen to a gifted orator and ask how? The printed word can do little more than repeat the words, and suggest the meaning. Leonard Shlain (*The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image*) argues that the written word left brained, analytical and masculine; whereas the spoken word is right brained, emotional, and feminine; and the very nature of meaning changes with the printed word. Whether you agree or not, it only takes few minutes of writing to realize that it is different from talking. For one thing, your words are frozen in place, with no opportunity to see the glazed look in your reader's eyes and adjust your story to make it more interesting, or to explain why something is important to him.

In the centuries on either side of Gutenberg, rhetoric and logic were central to any good education: and the educated seemed not to need, or want, the clarifying nature of punctuation. Movable metal type printing, however, brought books to people whose education was not as formal or complete. So there might have been a pull—in a marketing sense: a perceived need pulls sales— towards clarification.

Setting type is time consuming. It is not just selecting, one-by-one, each letter, but inserting small pieces of shim stock between letters and words to set each line tightly against the ends of a composing stick. To a large extent, typesetters were responsible for the development and use of punctuation. (For example, Aldus Manutius, 1449/1450–1515, is credited with introducing the semicolon, and invented italic type and the pocket size book.) I suggest that this served several purposes. Inserting a comma, or other punctuation, is easier than adding ten tiny pieces of metal—time is save and costs reduced. If such punctuation makes your book easier to read and understand compared to the publisher next door, all other things being equal, you'll get more business—pushing the use of punctuation—reduced cost would benefit the publisher, therefore, he would push—in a marketing sense—this new feature. (People had a less fastidious attitude regarding correct spelling. For example, I have a facsimile of 16th century edition of *On Civility*. On one spread the word "thing" is spelled "thing," "thinge," "thyng," and "thynge." I can only believe that this was done to save money on typesetting and that readers did not mind variations in spelling.)

For what ever reasons, we have punctuation; we depend on it to clarify our understanding of what we read; and it needs to be used correctly.

Fun examples of the necessity of punctuation come from words games, for example: "King Charles walked and talked half an hour after his head was cut off": or, "King Charles walked and talked, half an hour after, his head was cut off."

The British system refers to periods as full stops. Considered one way, there is a continuum of stops: (,) (;) (:) (.)—(!) and (?) being special conditions of tone. These stops, in part, indicate the completeness of sense or thought, or they could be equated with pauses from short to long. In part, this is a rhetorical function. There is also a logical function: providing meaning that is not otherwise obvious from the words alone. Within some limits, the use of certain types of punctuation can be open (characterized by fewer commas and other punctuation, to closed) or closed punctuation (characterized by more commas and other punctuation).

Because the idea of *stops* is effective and convenient, I will use it. Be aware that it is British and not everyone will understand if you use this classification.

The writer's goal is towards clarity, understanding and ease of reading—if the reader does not understand you, what do you gain by using more or less commas? If a punctuation mark aids in understanding, keep it: if it does nothing, remove it. There is enough distance between keeping and removing punctuation, especially with modest changes in word order, figures of speech, and grammar, to provide room for the gifted stylist and the functionally competent writer.

MULTIPLE PUNCTUATION:

Multiple marks—mostly involve quotation marks, parentheses, brackets, dashes, and abbreviations:

- The U. K., where I vacationed last year, is having a wet spring.
- She said (I always listen carefully), "Why didn't you tell me?"

Sentence end—if an abbreviation that ends with a period is the ultimate word, omit the full stop (period).

- I intend to vacation in the U.K.

Same place—when two different marks are called for at the same location, only the stronger mark is kept:

- Who shouted, "Kill the king!" (no question mark)
- "Where is your homework?" asked Miss Whitehouse. (no comma)

STOPS

PERIOD (.)

Full stop: a period is used to show the end of a declarative or an imperative, sentence, or fragment:

- Miss Whitehouse smiled, like a cat might smile at a mouse.
- Stand there.
- I couldn't.

Requests: a polite request usually takes a period, not a question mark:

- Will you please send your catalogue.
- Will the audience please welcome our speaker.

Sentence within a sentence: do not use a period at the end of the internal sentence:

- On Saturday (it's my birthday), we are having a party.
- Miss Whitehouse's reply, "Well, let's not let that happen again," was unexpected.

Abbreviations: most, not all, abbreviations and initials take a period (a brief list):

Names—initials are followed by a period (note: first names, such as Benjamin, Charles, or William can be abbreviated, Benj., Ch. Wm.; these should not be used unless the referring to how a particular person signs his name: Benj. Franklin):

- H. L. Mencken
- Harry S. Truman
  —but: FDR, JFK, for persons known by their initials

Titles before a name—abbreviate titles (note: civil and military titles are spelled out if followed only by the last name):

- Dr. Smith
- Mr. Jones
- Ms Lukas
- Sen. Ted Kennedy (or: Senator Kennedy)
- Gen. George Washington (or: General Washington)

Titles, degrees, etc., after a name:

- Mr. Thomas V. Pierce, Sr.
  —but: Mr. Pierce—no "Sr." if the name is not given in full; Jr. and Sr. are preceded by a comma)
- Lowell Hana III, Ph.D. (Mr., Ms, Mrs., Dr. are dropped if another title is used)

Countries:

- U.K.
- U.S.
- W. Ger.

U.S. states:

- Ariz. (or: AZ)
- Mich. (or: MI)

Years, months, days, and time:

- A.D. 1066 (A.D., A.H., A.M. and A.S. usually precede the year, and are in small caps)
- 445 B.C. (B.C., B.C.E., B.P., and C.E. usually follow a year, and are in small caps)
- Jan. (sometimes Ja)
- Sun. (sometimes Su)
- A.M.

General:

- abbr.
- univ.
- e.g.
- Q.E.D.
- etc.

Exceptions—when agency and organizational names are abbreviated they are generally given in caps and without periods:

    - FTC
    - AAA
    - IBM
    - AFL-CIO

Lists—use a period to enumerate items in a list:
- 1. dates
- 2. oranges and lemons

With quotation marks, parentheses, and brackets—periods are placed within quotation marks (except single quotes in particular linguistic and philosophical uses). When parentheses or brackets enclose an independent sentence the period is placed inside. If the enclosed matter is part of the including sentence, the period is placed outside.
- Miss Whitehouse said, "Your paper on Kant is due Monday."
- Dr. Lefferts did not define 'a fortiori'.
- She did talk about the "noble savage."
- My favorite story is "The Pit and the Pendulum."
- The problem of design can be complicated. (I worked as an art director for fifteen years.) Often the function of the final pieces dictates how to handle compositional elements.
- When I set type (I use Indesign), I am conscious of the style of writing.

EXCLAMATION POINT (!)

Exclamation points—these indicate an outcry or an emphatic or ironic comment (use sparingly; as Mark Twain said, using an exclamation point is like laughing at your own joke):
- Stop!
- You can say that again!
- What you told your boss was certainly polite!

With quotation marks, parentheses, and brackets—place inside when part of the quoted or parenthetical material; place outside when it is not:
- Miss Whitehouse yelled, "Get out of my class!"
- "Get out!" she yelled at him.
- Miss Whitehouse (I could have died!) called me names in front of the class.
- I said, so politely, "Please excuse me"!

Misues: Editorial protest—do not use an exclamation point (in parentheses or brackets) to show protest inside a quote.
- In the meeting, Chairman Newhouse said "I welcome differing points of view. That is why I have invited Dan Rather and Ann Coulter [!] to speak next week."

QUESTION MARK (?)

Question mark—sometimes called an interrogation point, is used to mark the end of a question:
- Where are we going?

- "Who wrote *Moby Dick*?" she asked.
- I asked, "Who yelled, 'Fire!'?"
- Was it Patrick Henry who said, "Give me liberty or give me death!"?
- Can I rent the movie? was the only question I was thinking about during the lecture.
- It is time? (a declarative or imperative sentence can be stated as a question)

Emphasis—to give special emphasis to interrogative elements in a sentence:
- Is Professor Winston competent? prepared? well enough?

Series—a series of questions, even if they are not complete sentences:
- When you hired Professor Winston did you know he was competent? Prepared to lecture? Wasn't ill?

Uncertainty—used within parentheses to show doubt or uncertainty about the preceding word or fact:
- There were 153 (?) students in attendance.
- Josquin des Prez was born in 1450 (?) and died in 1521. (also: 1450 ca.)

Exceptions:

Indirect questions—do not use question marks with indirect questions:
- She asked if we were prepared.

Requests—a courteous request usually takes a period:
- Will you send the proof as soon as you can.
- Will you please rise for the anthem.

With quotations, parentheses, and brackets— place inside when part of the quoted or parenthetical material; place outside when it is not:
- Bob asked the conductor, "When do we get to Chicago?"
- The investigator asked who said, "David didn't get to the store until nine"?
- Is this the book you were talking about (I have another copy if it isn't)?
- I have a copy of the Mozart's *Requiem*, (or was it written by Haydn?).

Misuse: irony and humor—do not use the question mark, usually encased in parentheses, to the writer's humor or irony:
- The *North Coast Review* published three of George Severn's poems (?) in the last issue.

SEMICOLON (;)

Independent clauses—use a semicolon between two independent clauses (two, closely connected sentences):

no conjunction—when they are not joined by a conjunction (*and, but, for, or, nor,* and *yet*):
- The storm lasted for several days; we did not know if we would be evacuated.

explanatory expression—when they are joined by an explanatory expression:
- The storm piled up eight feet of snow; on the other hand, we had enough food to enjoy our enforced seclusion.

conjunctive adverb**—**(as, when, since, after, before, etc.) when they are joined by a conjunctive adverb:
- We were snowed in two weeks; nevertheless, we had a great time.

Series—when any item of series itself contains a comma:

- The book was made possible by John Davis and Lorna Smith, librarians with the Cleveland Public Library; Sarah Norris; Judy Little; and David Jones, professor of Medieval Literature, Cleveland State University.

Emphasis—by giving a longer pause between items, the semicolon may be used to separate items in series to give them emphasis:

- Following the disaster, the President spoke with clarity and precision; empathy and concision; dignity and resolution.

Quotations—when a quotation is followed by a semicolon, the semicolon is placed outside the closing quotation mark:

- My attorney said, "Your case is well supported"; on the other hand, I just couldn't afford to proceed.

Misuse: instead of a colon—often misused following the salutation in business letters or setting off a series:

- Dear Mr. Jefferson; …
- The sources for this book include; Walsh's Plain English, Fowler's The King's English…

COLON (:)

Generally, the colon draws attention to what follows, thus suggesting the complete of something just started:

Linking—a colon can link two separate clauses or phrases to indicate some kind of step forward (introduction to theme, cause to effect, general to specific, premise to conclusion):

- Art is created in solitude: life is community.

List—introduce a list of items, usually preceded by an expression such as "the following" or "as follows":

- The committee approved the following: the budget will be moved for approval, the building committee will review the plans, and the archives will be moved to another room.

Quotes—use a colon to introduce quotes (most often in formal writing):

- The Secretary General addressed the forum: "We are here, today, to . . ." (but a comma may introduce if it is run into the text: The Secretary General was concerned that people, "from third world countries . . .")

Salutations—in formal correspondence, a colon often follows the salutation:

- Dear Dr. Jackson:

Proportions—indicates a ratio

- We have a 15:1 student-teacher ratio.

Time—indicates hours and minutes:

- 10:15

Misuse—do not use the colon to introduce a simple list, especially in informal writing:

- Tom likes: pizza, fried chicken, apple pie, and beer. (incorrect)

COMMA (,)

The comma is the least emphatic mark, but in many ways it is the most important for meaning, and easiest to abuse. It can be used in an open style (a light use of commas), and closed style (a fairly heavy use of commas). While the advice leans towards, "When in doubt, leave it out," its usage should not be predicated on doubt but meaningful use.

Series of items—a comma is placed between each item of a list. There is a debate about whether to include a comma between the last and next-to-last items. The problem is that "and" is generally placed between the last two items: without a comma, this could indicate a compound item. "John likes grits, fried tomatoes, eggs and bacon"; or ". . . eggs, and bacon." Are the eggs separate from the bacon (eggs, and bacon)? Or, does John like a mixture of eggs and bacon? If John likes a mixture: "John likes grits, fried tomatoes, and eggs and bacon." Including the comma prevents ambiguity.

- For breakfast, John likes grits, fried tomatoes, eggs, and bacon.

Series of adjectives—adjectives that each qualify a noun in the same way (see **Misuses** for different ways) are separated by a comma:

- The sluggish, polluted Cuyahoga River caught fire several times. (note: if you can say "sluggish and polluted" a comma can be substituted for the "and")

Introductory phrase or subordinate clause—because the subject normally comes at the beginning of a sentence, the comma separates the phrase from the subject:

- Yesterday when I was washing, the telephone rang. (note: 1. without the comma, the miscue suggests: Yesterday when I was washing the phone . . . 2. many authorities suggest short one to three-word introductory phrases do not need a comma. One view is that if the is no possibility of confusion omit the comma; another view is that whatever style the author chooses, she should be consistent provided there are no miscues.)

Compound sentences—when the clauses of a compound sentence are joined by a conjunction, a comma is placed before the conjunction:

- John studied relentlessly, and it paid off when he took the exam.

Parentheticals—a comma sets off the beginning and end of a parenthetical word, phrase, or clause, appositive, nonrestrictive clause, interjections. (These are not essential to understanding the sentence. In a sense, both nonrestrictive and appostives are parenthetical.):

- Daniel's country home, which has a pond and a garden, is located near Jefferson.
- My father, Ralph, wrote three books.
- Many people argue that the health care bill, passed last month, might be unconstitutional.
- Yes, I said I liked the book.
- When we looked into the problem, alas, things had gone too far.

Mistaken junction—to avoid miscues, when, for example words could be read as if joined:

- To Debbie, Smith devoted his life.

Emphasis—the comma can be used to emphasize the contrast between coordinate sentence elements:

- Professor Sommer grades severely, but fairly.

Identical words—to make reading easier, similar or identical words may be separated by a comma:

- What it is, is a good read.

Direct address—use a comma to set off words used in direct address:

- Tom, I didn't ask for your paper today.

Participial phrases—after participial phrases:

- Seeing what I've written, Miss Whitehouse would be proud of me.

Salutations—in informal letters a comma is used after the salutation:

- Dear Tom,

Addresses—commas separate the elements of an address used within text:

- 317 Arial Loop, South Amherst, NM

Dates—commas separate the elements of an address when it follows this order:

- The program starts April 23, 2010, . . . (no comma in: 23 April 2010 . . .)

Misuses

Series of adjectives—if the adjectives in a series qualify a noun differently, or when one adjective qualifies a noun phrase containing another adjective, do not use a comma:

- John Service is a prominent, federal, judge. (correct: "prominent, federal judge"—" "federal judge" is a noun phrase)

Before or after a series—do not put a comma before or after a series:

- David likes, grits, toast, eggs, and bacon, for breakfast.

Subject and verb—do not put a comma between the subject and the verb, or verb from its object:

- The two subcommittees that had oversight met Tuesday. (No comma after oversight.)

Indirect quotes—do not put a comma before an indirect quote:

- Tom said he would prepare the report over the weekend. (No comma after said.)

OTHER MARKS

APOSTROPHE (')

Possessives—an apostrophe is used to show possession:

- John's book (singular)
- the students' classes (plural)
- Tom Jones' or Jones's (words ending in "s")
- Have you been to Tom and Jerry's favorite bar. (joint possession)
- Jean's and David's expectations were quite different. (shows separate possession)

Contractions—apostrophes are used to indicate the omission of letters. Contractions are considered inappropriate for formal writing; however, there are many examples of good, formal writing that use them. They can be grouped from appropriate to inappropriate:

- didn't (did not)
- can't (cannot)
- you'll (you will)
- it's (it is)
- let's (let us)

For ease of readability some contractions are best reserved for dialogue:
- would've (would have)
- should've (should have)

To avoid confusion, don't use, and with caution in dialogue:
- it'd (it would, or it had?)
- who're (who are, or whore?)
- shouldn't've (should not have)

Plurals—to pluralize acronyms, numbers, letters, and words:
- CPA's (optional)
- 1990's (optional)
- Ph.D.'s
- maybe's (optional)
- p's and q's
- A's, I's, M's (Xs or Bs might be optional, but where the plural without an apostrophe could be confusing, use the apostrophe)

Misuses

Personal pronouns—"his," "hers," "yours," "ours," theirs," "its," "whose" are possessive and do not take an apostrophe:
- That is his book. (not: His' book.)
- Her classes. (not: Her' book, or her's book.)

Plurals—other than the plurals mentioned above, do not use an apostrophe:
- Apples $4.95 a dozen. (not: Apple's $4.95 a dozen.)

BRACKETS ([ ]) See Square Brackets

BULLET (•)

Bullets draw attention to listed items. They are particularly useful when a numbered list could imply a ranking.

DASH, EM (—)

Interruption—an em dash is used to mark the interruption of a sentence. If the sentence resumes, a second em dash marks the end of the interruption. The interruption can be as mild as an nonrestrictive appositive, normally set off by commas, to a parenthetical remark, to a sudden and abrupt change:
- My father—Ralph—has expressive aphasia.
- His book—published six years ago—was garnered quite a bit of acclaim.
- I wrote him—how often have I written and called, pleading my case—but he has never contacted me.

Emphasis—an em dash can be substituted for a comma in a series to provide emphasis:
- The last time anyone saw him—bleeding an bruised—deranged and disoriented—he had escaped the enemy lines, only to turn and run back to them.

Afterthought—an em dash can separate an afterthought or surprise ending to a sentence:
- . . . he had escaped the enemy lines—only to turn and run back to them.

Speech—the em dash can indicate faltering or interrupted speech (see Ellipsis dots):
- I—I—no, we—dear god, we were hopelessly lost with night falling and a storm approaching.
- "You don't mean we—"
  "Yes! Damn you! You've led us to a shear cliff."

Colon—The em dash can substitute for a colon—
- Life is hardly fair—and fairly hard.
- We were awarded a large contract: a record contract, ten percent royalties, a six-month tour, and television promotional spots.

2-em dash—a 2-em dash indicates missing letters:
- There are m—— letters throughout the file.

DASH, EN (–)

To—the en dash is used to mean "to":
- 1914–1919
- 175–227 sudents
- the Chicago–Los Angeles route

Versus—the en dash is used to mean "versus":
- the Ali–Frazier match

Joining—the en dash is used to show joint authorship:
- Russell–Whitehead (however: Bulwer-Lytton, who is one person, and who compound name is joined by a hyphen)

ELLIPSIS DOTS (. . .)

Ellipsis points—period dots come in threes, and can be spaced: . . . (separated by normal letter spacing), . . . (separated by thin spaces), or … (the ellipsis glyph); the spacing is a matter of style, and means nothing, but the spacing should be consistent.

Omission—the normal use of ellipsis dots is to indicate an intentional omission usually in quotes:
- The value of a liberal arts education . . . is no longer significant in a world obsessed with specialization. (The quote has omitted words between "education" and "is."

Existing punctuation—other punctuation can be used on either side of the ellipsis point:
- Early music performance, . . . is best exemplified by Andrew Meinz. Have you heard him? . . . His recordings are stunning.

Four dots—1) Four dots with no space before them indicate that the preceding sentence is complete:

- Ives' Fourth Symphony was revised between 1924–1926. . . . The Carnegie Hall premier by the American Symphony Orchestra was in 1965.

2) Four dots with a space before them indicate the preceding sentence is incomplete:

- Ives' Fourth Symphony was revised . . . . The Carnegie Hall premier by the American Symphony Orchestra was in 1965. ["Between 1924-1926," the end of the sentence has been removed, as well as one or more intervening sentences.]

Block quotes—See Block quotes, page 13

Speech—in speech an ellipsis can show an unspoken alternative, a non-enumerated sequence, a silence, or a trailing thought:

- Lucrezia Borgia smiled sweetly. "May I offer you some . . . wine?" [alternative—or perhaps *something* else]
- "We went on the Matterhorn," Dave said excitedly, "Pirates of the Caribbean, the Wild West . . ." [non-enumerated sequence—and then this, then that, then this . . .]
- "I know he had a cough, but . . . I didn't know . . ." [silence—the pregnant pause]
- "My father died last month. We had great times, like vacationing in Michigan . . ." [trailing thought—here, memories swept over the speaker]

HYPHEN (-)

Hyphens combine or indicate a break in words:

Compound words—can be closed, hyphenated, open, and suspended:

- bookcase (closed)
- part-time (hyphenated)
- full moon (open)
- full- and part-time workers (suspended)
- anti-Semitic (but antisocial: compounds with prefixes are normally not hyphenated unless 1. the second word is capitalized or is a number (pre-1890); 2. repeated vowels (co-op); 3. to avoid confusion (re-cover, meaning to cover again; recover, meaning to get back or to get well)

Plurals—compound words like father-in-law, or attorney general are pluralized by applying the plural form to that element that is subject to a change in number:

- fathers-in-law
- attorneys general

If the compound is hierarchical in nature—sergeant major, assistant secretary—it is the base element, regardless of placement, that takes the plural form:

- first sergeants
- sergeants major
- deputy librarians
- assistant secretaries of defense

Phrasal adjectives—if two or more words make sense or are intended to make sense when they are together as an adjective, those words should be hyphenated:

- credit-card application (but: He has three credit cards.)
- small-business loans (but: There are over three hundred small business downtown.)

Word breaks—end-of-line hyphens are used to break words at the end of a line so that word spacing is even. See page 132, Syllabication.

PARENTHESES [( )]

Parentheses—words, phrases, sentences can be enclosed by parentheses. These can indicated:

Interpolations—interpolations and remarks by the writer:

- We enjoyed out visit with the O'Connors (Flannery and her mother) last August.

Running text—to specify an authority, definition, or reference in one's own text:

- We spoke of organized crime (TLG 241) and how it interacted with the government (TLG 310) . . .

Interruptions—in speech, parentheses are used to indicate a general reaction:

- According to the transcript of the interview Mr. Rush didn't think the issue was serious, "When I first heard the accusations (laughter), if that is what they could be called . . ."

Reference letters—reference letters or numbers are often separated by parentheses:

- 501(c)(3)

QUOTATION MARKS (" ")

Quote—quotation marks are used to when quoting someone directly (showing variations in punctuation):

- "Bob ran fifty miles yesterday," Coach Wilson told the reporter.
- "How far?" he asked.
- Bob interrupted, "Coach, I only ran half a mile."
- "I thought," Coach Wilson scratched his head, "you said fifty."
- "What a jerk!" the reporter snapped as he closed his notebook and walked out.
- "I didn't mean—"
- "You did."

Quote within a quote—for a quote within a quote, use single marks (opening and closing):

- "I told you, David said, 'I ran fifty miles yesterday.'"
- "Jean sang 'Sing a Happy Song.'"
- "Did you ask, 'When is the term paper due?'"

Words—when referring to a word as a word, use quotes:

- The origin of "paraphernalia" is interesting.

So-called—when something is so-called-but-not-really:

- If Smythe is a "great" painter, I haven't seen it.

Neologisms—invented words are contained in quotations:

- Under the table is Henry's "huddy."

Titles—titles of magazine articles, short stories, songs, poems are take quotation marks:

- Tim sang "Dolphin" for his encore.
- The encore piece was "Dolphin."

Punctuation—

Periods & commas—periods and commas are generally placed within the closing quotation mark, even if there is no comma or period in the quoted matter at that place:

- It was Lincoln who said, “For score and seven years ago.”

Colon & semicolon— periods and commas go outside the closing quotation:

- Mozart quickly composed his “Jupiter”: Otto Klemperer played it slowly.

Misuse—many people put indirect quotes in single quotation marks:

- Wrong: Ceasar thought ‘The senators look too friendly’ as he walked towards them.
- Wrong, but used occasionally: *The senators look too friendly*, Ceasar thought as he walked towards them.
- Correct: Ceasar thought the senators looked too friendly as he walked towards them.

SQUARE BRACKETS ([ ])

Comments—use brackets to enclose editorial comments, corrections, or explanations:

- “The North Americin [sic] explorers . . .”
- “Diego Ortiz’s Tratado de Glosas [Spanish title in full: “Trattado de Glosas sobre Clausulas y otros generos depuntos en la Musica de Violones nuevamente puestos en luz”—Editor] is considered a masterpiece of literature for the viola da gamba.”
- “These glosses [ornamental improvisation] are codified such that . . .”
- Many performers find “[t]hese glosses are codified such that . . .”
- Dr. Jameson contends that Bach preferred the phrasing Wagner developed almost two hundred years later:

> According to Schwitzer, Bach phrased *toward the highest notes* [emphasis added], thus we have to consider current “original instrument” performance practice falsely revisionist.

Parentheses—brackets may be used as parentheses within parentheses:

- Ortiz’s treatise on ornamentation (originally published in Rome [Trattado de Glosas . . .] in 1565) is a thorough explication . . .

VIRGULE (/)

Virgule—commonly “slash,” has a variety of uses:

Per—shorthand for “per”:

- His car gets 23 mi/gal.

Or—in the construction “and/or” the slash means “or”:

- This image is contrasty and/or the lighting is too bright.

And—between two words it can mean “and”:

- Every teacher/student has to do a course review survey.

Poetry—to separate run-in lines of poetry:

- When Lear says “Be your tears wet? yes, faith. I pray, weep not. / If your have poison for me, I will drink it” he was talking to . . .

Fractions—to separate the numerator and the denominator:

- 17/32

Dates—to separate the elements of a date, used informally:

- 5/21/10

Prepositions & Conjunctions

In preparing this book, I came across this:

> Although idioms [prepositional idioms] cannot be parsed, the careful writer will not therefore assume that he can use them as he pleases. His idiomatic usage should conform to the word-links generally acceptable. A good dictionary will contain a statement of idiomatic usage following words which need such explanation. The writer should be especially careful to consult his dictionary when using certain word-groups of prepositions plus nouns, adjectives, or verbs. — Harry Shaw, Jr., *Writing and Rewriting*.

I took Mr. Shaw's short list and looked up the words in my *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*—arguably a great dictionary. Of the first twelve words, there was no example or mention of its correct use in a propositional idiom. I feel partially vindicated. Yes, when Miss Whitehouse said look up the correct spelling, and I replied, "I can't look it up because I don't know how to spell it," I was wrong. But if she had suggested looking up the correct prepositional idiom, I would have been right.

Here is the problem, if I have always heard and read the shorter word for automobile, "car," and I write, "I wish Miss Whitehouse had been hit by a car," I have no reason to look up "car." If I have always heard "She was *oblivious of* her surroundings," why would I check? Especially since having looked up twelve examples, I knew the correct preposition for *oblivious* wouldn't be in my dictionary. Actually it was! I should have said, "She was *oblivious to* her surroundings."

Does it matter? Just before I started to write this paragraph, I answered a question on the CS forum, and I found myself stuck: is it "something is a *precursor to*" or ". . . *precursor of*"? Apparently if is "of." Yes, I think it is important, not for your characters, unless you happen to include Miss Whitehouse as one of your *dramatis personæ*, but for you, if you are the omniscient narrator. Here is the beginning of a small journey.

Prepositions and conjunctions link things. All sorts of words can do this.

Prepositions connect an antecedent (noun, adjective, verb, phrase, etc.) with an object (noun, adjective, phrase, etc.) showing it's relationship; for example:

- Accompaniment: John went *with* Sue to the movie.
- Agency: The report was drafted *by* Mr. Horrowitz.
- Cause: The tree fell down *because of* the storm. (because of is a prepositional idiom)
- Place: I am going *to* Spain on my vacation.
- Time: We intend to arrive *before* the others.

In the cause of brevity, prepositions often use more words: T*he report was drafted by Mr. Horrowitz* versus *Mr. Horrowitz drafted the report.*

Oh, boy! I can hear Miss Whitehouse now. In her way, she would be right. Prepositions also act as modifiers: *The flowers in the garden attract all kinds of butterflies. In the garden* modifies *flowers*; thus, it is an adjectival phrase. *John ran through the bushes to retrieve the ball.* Yes, *through the bushes*, modifies *ran*, and it is an adverbial phrase. But it links, too, doesn't it?

There are some words that are usually prepositions that can be used as part of a verb (called *particles)*, for example:

- John Dillinger held up banks.
- Some say Joseph Kennedy did not come by his money honestly.
- We thought she would never live down her shame.

Here are a few: bring up, broke up, find out, give in, look up, pull through, turn in. However, there is still a prepositional feel, sort of like Yoda-speak: Up quite a bill John ran.

Miss Whitehouse, if you are listening, here's the deal, I'll try to use the correct preposition, but I really don't care about a theory that is like the the *Young Girl or Old Lady* (after W. E. Hill)—sometimes this or that.

Here is an incomplete and simple list of common prepositions. Later, when we look at prepositional idioms, understanding these will help determining which preposition works best. To save space, I have used "literal" to mean, for example: literal—*at* indicates place, as in "John is at the movies"; whereas, figurative—*at* can also mean in the state of, *at war*, toward, *mad at the policy*, connected with, *he works at UPS*, etc. The latter could be considered to represent a figurative place.

PREPOSITIONS

aboard	place	I was invited aboard his yacht for the afternoon.
about	place	The children ran about the yard.
	time	He left about noon for his appointment.
	quantity	He read about fifteen books for class.
	connection	Don't worry about me.
above	place	You'll find the hats above the coat rack.
	time	The test took above the allotted hour.
	surpassing	The siren sounded above the traffic noise.
across	place (literal)	He drove across town.
	place (figurative)	A smile spread across his face.
after	place	The 4H float came after the high school's in the parade.
	time	New business comes after old business at the meeting.
	in honor of	He was named after Thomas Jefferson.
	conformity	His style is after that of Charlie Parker.
against	place	The car is up against the back of the garage.
	opposition	Obama ran against McCain.
	debit	Trip will be charged against your balance.
	preparation	They keep candles against the possibility of a bad storm.
along	place	We drove along the river to see the fall foliage.
	time	As a nation we have learned some things along the way.

amid	place	He was alone amid the crowded streets.
	opposition	His resolve was unshaken amid the evidence piling up against his plan.
among	place (literal)	His building was among those on the upper west side of town.
	place (figurative)	The design of his building was among the best in town.
around	place	We travelled around the state.
	time	We will arrive around noon.
at	place (literal)	He is at the movies.
	place (figurative)	England was at war in 1943.
	time	You can expect the report at 3:30 p.m.
	amount	The exchange rate is at 0.97 today.
barring	excepting	The picnic will be on Saturday barring bad weather.
before	place	He stood before the group.
	time	He arrived before the others.
	in advance	We will serve no wine before its time.
behind	place (literal)	The 4H float was behind the high school's float.
	place (figurative)	He had a lot of money behind him.
	time	He is running behind schedule..
below	place	The book is below the magazines.
	inferior	The return on his investment was below average.
beneath	place (literal)	The hidden passage is beneath the kitchen floor.
	place (figurative)	After his actions, it was clear he was beneath contempt.
beside	place (literal)	The road to the school runs beside the stream.
	place (figurative)	The argument was beside the point.
between	place (literal)	I left the book between the magazines and the vase on the table.
	place (figurative)	There really is a difference between French vanilla and vanilla.
beyond	place (literal)	The restaurant is just beyond the high school.
	place (figurative)	The success of the movie was beyond everyone's expectation.
	time	He worked beyond the allotted time limit.
but	exception	He had everything but love.
by	place (literal)	The river runs by the high school.
	place (figurative)	The house measures forty by fifty-two feet.
	time	I bill by the day.
	agency	*Old Man in the Sea* was written by Hemingway.
	quantity	The refugee camps are filled by the thousands.
down	place (literal)	He drove the truck down the road.
	time	The song came down the centuries.
during	time	It rained during the entire party.
except	exception	He didn't care about much except his dog.
for	place (literal)	The lake extends for miles.

	place (figurative)	This check is for you.
	time	The sale will last for two weeks.
	quantity	The company failed for several reasons.
from	place (literal)	The restaurant is five block from here.
	place (figurative)	The litmus paper turns from blue to red in the presence of acid.
	time	The office will be open from nine in the morning until six.
in	place (literal)	The park is in the center of town.
	place (figurative)	The problem is, in my opinion, that no one cares.
	time	The book will be published in three months.
into		Caution: *into* and *in to* are different.
	place (literal)	We went into the room when we were called.
	place (figurative)	His performance breathed new life into the old work.
	time	His wait turned from weeks into months.
like	resemblance	He look like he needs a vacation.
of	place	Columbus is south of Cleveland.
	quantity	He had to drive a distance of 57 miles to get to the hospital.
	possession	She is a cousin of mine.
	connection	I heard wonderful things of him.
off	place	Copper Basin goes west off White Spar.
	distance	Old Dearfield is off the main highway.
	disconnection	They took my name off the list
on	place (literal)	I put the keys on the table.
	place (figurative)	On the heels of his first success, he released a second CD.
	time	It all happened on the same Tuesday.
	agency	Atget, the photographer, lived on bread and milk.
	state	Dr. Smith is on call tonight.
onto		Caution: *onto* and *on to* are different.
	motion	The cat jumped onto the table.
out	place (literal)	He works out of his him.
	place (figurative)	Her clothes are out of fashion.
over	place (literal)	He looked up at the ceiling over his head.
	place (literal)	He wore a jacket over his tee shirt.
	place (figurative)	They won the playoffs over their rivals.
	time	He forgot his pain over the years.
	quantity	He worked over thirty-three years at the same company.
past	place (literal)	I drive past your house every day.
	place (figurative)	His fate is past redemption.
	time	He should have called by now, it's past five.
since	time	It's four years since mother died.

through	place (literal)	The Rogue River runs through Medford.
	place (figurative)	When we were in Nepal, we spoke through an interpreter.
	time	We stayed in Nepal through the first month of summer.
til/until	time	We intended to stay til the Johnsons returned.
to	place (literal)	He is driving to Ohio in the spring.
	place (figurative)	It dropped to below freezing last night.
	time	It is now ten to six.
toward(s)	place (literal)	The front of the house faces toward the east.
	place (figurative)	He was drawn toward the new technology.
	time	It was getting on towards evening when they finally moved the car.
under	place (literal)	There are people who live under the Goodwin Street bridge.
	place (figurative)	He grew up under the guidance of the Church.
	time	Under the Sun King, the arts in France flourished.
up	place	You'll find the restaurant just up the road from the library.
with	place (literal)	When you're in Illinois, you can stay with my sister.
	place (figurative)	The President speaks with great authority.
	agency	I finished the work with John's help.

Phrasal Prepositions

This is a brief list of common compound prepositions made up of two or more words, which function as a single preposition.

abreast of
according to
ahead of
alongside of
antecedent to
apart from
apropos of
as against
as between
as compared with
as distinct from
as far as
as far back as
as for
as opposed to
as to
aside from
at the cost of
at the hands of
at the peril of
at the point of
at the risk of

back of
because of
beyond the reach of
by dint of
by the help of
by means of
by virtue of
by way of
care of
concurrently with
contrary to
counter to
differently from
down to
due to

east of
exclusive of
exclusive to
face to face with
for example
for fear of

for lack of
for the benefit of
for the ends of
for the purpose of
for the sake of
for want of
from above
from among
from behind
from below
from beneath
from between
from beyond
from in front of
from lack of
from out of
from over
from under

hand in hand with

in accordance with

in addition to
in advance of
in agreement with
inasmuch as
in back of
in behalf of
in the interest of
in between
in care of
in case of
in common with
in company with
in comparison with (to)
in compliance with
in conflict with
in conformity with
in consequence of
in consideration of
in contrast with (to)
in course of
in default of
in defiance of
in disregard of
in the face of
in favor of
in front of
if lieu of
in obedience to
in opposition to
in order that
in place of
in point of
in preference to
in process of
in proportion to
in pursuit of
in quest of
in recognition of
in reference to
in regard to
in relation to
in respect to
in reply to

in return for
in search of
insofar as
in spite of
in support of
in that
in the case of
in the matter of
in the middle of
in the name of
in the presence of
in the place of
in the teeth of
in the way of
in token of
in view of
inclusive of
independently of
inside of
irrespective of

next door to
next to
north of

on account of
on behalf of
on pain of
on the face of
on the occasion of
on the part of
on the point of
on the pretense of
on the score of
on the side of
on the strength of
on top of
opposite to
out of
outside of
out of regard for
out of respect for
over and above

owing to
preferably to
preliminary to
preparatory to
previously to
prior to
pursuant to

regardless of
relative to

short of
side by side with
so far as
so far from
south from
subject to
subsequent to

thanks to
thorough lack of
to and fro
to the order of

under cover of
under pain of
up against
up and down

west of
with a view to
with an eye to
with reference to
with respect to
with the exception of
with regard to
with the exception of
with the intention of
with the object of
with the purpose of
with the view of
within reach of
without regard to

Prepositional Idioms

An idiom is an expression or phrase that has a figurative meaning: that is it often two or more words that appear together and mean something often quite different from their literal meaning. A propositional idiom is a verb with a preposition, the meaning of which is usually

determined by the preposition. Some argue that these are really phrasal verbs or, my gosh, verbal phrases.

You can find a list of over two thousand in Funk & Wagnall's *Standard Handbook of Prepositions , Conjunctions, Relative Pronouns & Adverbs* (available used); online, <http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/>, The Free Dictionary by Farlex, is an excellent source. There are thousands of idioms, but there are patterns, and they should make it possible to figure out the correct usage. As I said at the beginning of this section, not all dictionaries will help. Trust your ear. Here are some examples.

act for	The ombudsman is supposed to act for the average citizen.
act from	He clearly acted from personal interest, not duty.
act in	She acted in accord with the approved policies.
act on	The investigator acted on a tip from a disgruntled employee.
act toward	They did not know how to act toward him because of his experiences.
act under	It is clear they acted under orders.
act with	They were expected to act with dignity and respect.
agree in	I agree in general to the terms.
agree on	At least we agreed on one issue.
agree to	He agreed to our terms without having to read the full contract.
agree with	I agree with John: the agency is corrupt.
alliance against	Under the treaty, they formed an alliance against the invading Huns.
alliance between	The agreement assured the alliance between France and England would hold.
alliance with	The marriage cemented the alliance with the French.
arrest by	He was arrested by FBI agents.
arrest for	He was arrested for crimes against humanity.
arrest in	He was arrested in Virginia.
arrest on	He was arrested on trumped-up charges.
arrest with	He was arrested with the evidence on him.

But some prepositional idioms defy parsing out. Is it *identical to* or *identical with*? One on-line debate, starts with the premise that a college entrance exam considers *with* correct and *to* incorrect. Someone then argued that one could determine which was correct by analogy: we say *compared with* not *compared to*. However, Funk & Wagnal says *compared to* and *compared with* are both correct; but it is *identical to*—the opposite of the entrance exam.

Trust your ear. If Miss Whitehouse insists on *with*, and you use *to*, you will lose the fight to her, or to the entrance exam graders. Remember, what makes an idiom difficult is that it is not literal.

CONJUNCTIONS

Very much like propositions, conjunctions connect things: adjective, adverbs, nouns, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Some of these conjunctions are relative adverbs, some relative pronouns, and some we met as prepositions. It is important to note that what makes the relative adverbs and pronouns is that they are strong enough to act as conjunctions. What is being connected should be syntactically alike: nouns to nouns, adjectives to adjectives, phrases to phrases: that is, parallelism. There are three types of conjunctions, coordinating, subordinating, and correlative.

In good writing, not only is the parallelism—what is on either side of the conjunction—between grammatical elements, but between ideas.

Relative adverbs RA; relative pronouns RP

Coordinating Conjunctions

These conjunctions are:

- Additive: expressing the additions of things, advancement of time, or intensification of meaning (e.g. and, also, then)
- Contrasting: expressing the contrast between things (e.g. but, however, still)
- Inferential: expressing inference, consequence, etc. (e.g. consequently, so, thus)

also	RA	*Also* may be used alone or with *and*, *but*, etc. It indicates that what follows is of the same kind—*John is a good painter and also a good sculptor*.
and		*And* simply adds one thing to another without indicating anything about the connection—*He bought lettuce, carrots, and tomatoes for the salad.* Additionally: Continuing the narrative—*He drove to the store and went in.* Discriminative—*There are painters and there are painters.* Emphasis/intensification—*John is a painter and a good one too.* Fulfilment of action—*Please come and sit with us.*
besides	RA	Note: do not confuse *besides* (moreover) with *beside* (at the side of). *Besides* has the sense of moreover, furthermore, what is more—*Besides doing the yard work, John cleaned out the gutters.*
but		*But* introduces a thing in contrast or unexpectedness—*He remembered to buy the salad fixings but forgot the steak.* Additionally: As in *and—But what did you say?* As in *however/even if—I've given you the rules in a few pages, but the exceptions could fill a book.* As in *than—Congress no sooner passed the law, but it was repealed.* Exception—*No one but John brought his paints to class.*
consequently	RA	*Consequently* means as a result of—*John is a good painter, consequently he was asked to do the mural.*
else		*Else* indicates if not, with *or* or meaning *or—You had better do well on this test else you're out of here.*
furthermore		*Furthermore* (often used formally) indicates *in addition to—The bank said it will deal with the problem today, furthermore they said it won't happen again.*

hence RA *Hence* denotes cause or reason—*John is a staunch Republican, hence he voted for Bush.*

however RA Note: do not confuse *however* (nevertheless) with *how ever* (in whatever manner)
However limits what precedes it—*John is a staunch Republican, however he voted for Obama.*

moreover RA *Moreover* means beyond what has been said—*John is a very good painter, moreover he draws and sculpts well too.*

nevertheless RA *Nevertheless* means in spite of or however—*He has a broken leg nevertheless he gets around quite well.*

notwithstanding RA *Notwithstanding* means in spite of—*He gets around quite well, notwithstanding his broken leg.*

now RA *Now* means things being so—*The job will go smoothly, now that we have a new manager.*

or *Or* indicates an alternative—*You can use pears or apples in the salad.*

otherwise RA *Otherwise* means if not—*He will start the mural tomorrow, otherwise he has nothing to do.*

so RA *So* means as a consequence—*He is short, so he will have to use a ladder.*

still *Still* indicates a fixed opinion or despite anything to the contrary—*He was in a terrible traffic accident, still he drives too fast.*

then RA *Then* shows consequence—Y*ou made your decision, then I have no choice in the matter.*

therefore RA *Therefore* show consequence—*You were late for work, therefore you will be docked $50.*

thus RA *Thus* shows consequence—You failed every class, thus you will be held back one year.

Subordinating Conjunctions

These conjunctions express:

- Cause (because, since, whereas)
- Concession (although, nevertheless, yet)
- Condition (if, provided, unless)
- Place (after, before, where)
- Time (after, until, when)

after RA *After* means a sequence in time—*We went for dinner after we toured the park.*

although *Although* introduces a concessive element—*Skiing was fun, although I had a bad sunburn.*

as	RA	*As* conveys the idea of comparison or illustration—*Writing these examples becomes harder as I become tired.* Additionally: Likeness—*Charleton Heston starred as Ben Hur.* During the time—*I will be in the kitchen as the news comes on.* Because—*As I didn't finish my homework, I won't be going out tonight.*
because	RA	*Because* shows causation—*No one will be doing the mural because the city ran out of funds.*
before	RA	*Before* means prior to the time—He was told to get the work done before Mr. Johnson goes home.
for		*For* shows causation—*The question of healthcare is important, for it will affect us all.*
forasmuch		*Forasmuch*, with as, shows causation—*With all the problems, Mr Jacobs will be fired forasmuch as a small infraction of the rules.*
how	RA	*How* means in what manner, degree, or means—*I do not know how I am going to get this done in time.*
if		*If* expresses doubt, supposition, or conditionality—*You need to ask for help if this project is too hard.*
provided		*Provided* shows limitation or exception, it means if—*You can get to Carnegie Hall provided your practice very hard.*
save		*Save* means except—*All the children were well behaved save for Tim, who acting up.*
since	RA	*Since* means from that time—*Musical instruments have changed since the days of Bach and Mozart.* Additionally: Because—*The Baroque flute sounds different since it is wood and has no keys.*
than		*Than* shows comparison or degree—*John is shorter than Bob*. Additionally: Correspondence—*No sooner did we leave the theater than it started to rain.*
that	RP	*That* introduces a subordinate clause—*Based on the police report, it is clear that Bob was drunk*. Additionally: When—*It will be on the 14th that the painters will be out.* Giving a reason—*I arrived early that you would know I was committed to the job.*
though		*Though* means in spite of—*Many people still talk about my mother though she has been dead for almost fifteen years.*
till	RA	*Till* means up to a time—*The movie won't start till everyone is seated and quiet.*
unless		*Unless* means if not—*The movie will not be run unless everyone is quiet.*
until	RA	*Until* means up to a time—*Lunch is served until 2:30.*
what	RP	*What* means which thing—*Once John explained the situation, I knew what was going on.*
when	RA	*When* means at the same time—*I'll get the report done when I know the schedule.*
whenever	RA	*Whenever* means at whatever time—*I'll get the report done whenever you need it.*
where	RA	*Where* means on the contrary—*Most of my art is done on computer where most of John's is done in oils on canvas.*

whereas		*Whereas* means on the contrary—*My work is digital whereas John's is mixed media.*
whereby		*Whereby* means through which—*He uses egg tempera whereby he gets those luminous glazes.*
wherever	RA	*Wherever* means in any place—*She marks typos wherever she finds them.*
whether		*Whether*, like *if*, suggests doubt or uncertainty—*I don't care whether you like it or not, the job must get done.*
which	RP	*Which* generally refers to one or more of a group—*It doesn't matter which cover style you use, but the report must be ready by three.* Additionally: Indirect question—*But could you tell me which style you prefer.* Restrictive (*that* would be better)—*The report which Mr. Jacobs did last week is the perfect model.*
while	RA	*While* means at the same time—*I'll get the car ready while you bring down the bags.* Additionally: Even though—*I love horror movies while you like westerns.*
who	RP	*Who* refers to one or more people—*John is the artist who won best in show last month.*
why	RA	*Why* means because—*He wrote me yesterday and told me why he couldn't pay the invoice.* Additionally: Indirect question—*I asked him over and over why he never paid us.*
yet	RA	Yet means at the same time—*He has ten years of field experience yet he still need extra oversight.* Additionally: In spite of that—*He explained it to me yet I still don't really understand the problem.*

Correlative Conjunctions

These conjunctions are used in pairs. They connect words, phrases, or clauses that do not make complete sense alone; and they express a reciprocal relation between the part they connect.

although . . . nevertheless although . . . still although . . . yet	*Although . . . nevertheless* (*still* or *yet*) shows opposition or contrast; which one you use is mostly a matter of taste—*Although he works long hours, nevertheless he is always behind.*
as . . . as	*As . . . as* binds two clauses and focus on the latter—I stayed with my mother as long as I thought she would pull through.
as . . . so	*As . . . so* shows cause and effect—*As GM goes so goes the nation.* [This appears to be a clever paraphrase of testimony given by Charles Wilson, Chairman of GM and later Secretary of Defense, in 1953, to a Senate committee: "For years I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors and vice versa" NYT, 02.24.53]
both . . . and	*Both . . . and* unites two things and draws attention to each of them—*When I made the paprikash, I used both red and green peppers.*

either . . . or	*Either . . . or* gives a choice between to acceptable or true alternatives—*Either corn starch or potato starch will work as a thickener in that recipe.*
if . . . then	*If . . . then* associates a condition with a conclusion (the *then* is often omitted)—*If you don't learn the role soon, then you won't get the part.*
neither . . . nor	*Neither . . . nor* means not this and not that—*Neither his ignorance nor his temper will keep me from finishing the report.*
no . . . nor	*No . . . nor,* because of the *no*, the *nor* means *and no—I have no time nor interest in finishing the project.*
not . . . nor	*Not . . . nor*, because of the *not*, the *nor* means *and not—I read that you could not more nor blink when they used to take Daguerreotype photographs.*
not only—but also	*Not only . . . but also* adds emphasis to contrasted elements—*Not only was David Campbell a great reconteur but also a brilliant musician and dancer.*
since . . . therefore	*Since . . . therefore* emphasizes the consequence or conclusion (the *therefore* is often omitted)—*Since he was such a good speaker, therefore he was often asked to host meetings.*
so . . . as	Note: this is a different formulation from *so as*, which means *in order to*. *So . . . as* implies comparison—Y*our first painting was no so interesting as the second one in the series.*
so . . . that	*So . . . that* indicates consequence—*His acting is so good that he rarely auditions.*
though . . . nevertheless	See *although . . . yet*
when . . . then	When . . . then shows a sequence in time—*When you have free hour, then you can finish the project.*
where . . . there	*Where . . . there* emphasizes a sameness in place (somewhat poetic)—*Where lots of people gather and are distracted, there will be crime.*