

## COMMAS

- **Basics**

- Most versatile punctuation mark in English
- Ways to use a comma:
  - separating a list of three or more items
  - setting off non-essential information
  - linking closely-related independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction (i.e. FANBOYS)

- **Lists (of Nouns, Modifiers)**

- Commas can be used to separate items in a list or series
- Any list greater than 2 items requires commas between each item
  - "I love Taylor Swift, Kanye, and Beyonce" requires commas because the list has 3 items. However, "I love Kanye and Beyonce" doesn't use a comma because it contains only 2 things...pretty simple, right?
- It's important to keep in mind that lists can be made of any part of speech
  - "I wanted his hipster glasses, cargo shorts, and skater-boy shoes" lists **nouns**
  - "I swam, biked, and ran in our school's triathlon" lists **verbs**
  - "The skunk was big, hairy, and smelly" lists **adjectives**
  - "I behaved foolishly, beastly, and wildly at the party" lists **adverbs**
- Remember: the ACT will **always** use the Oxford comma...don't forget!

- **Non-Essential Information**

- Commas often set off clauses not essential to the meaning of a sentence
- If this information appears in the beginning, it will be followed by a comma. If it's in the middle of the sentence, it will be surrounded by commas. It never appears at the end of a sentence
  - In the beginning of sentence: "In May, I will buy a hoverboard."
  - In the middle of sentence: "The man with the shady mustache, whom I saw walking down the street, kept winking at me."
- There are seven types of clauses that can be set off this way (bear with me here)

- **Appositive:** A noun phrase providing a specific description to a following piece of information
  - "Abebe, a videogamer, coded his own videogame." "A videogamer" = specific description that follows "Jason."
- **Relative clause:** provides more information about noun it's describing -- contains who/whom/whose/which and a verb
  - "Shonda, who typically likes fried chicken, only ate french fries when she went to KFC." John doing well on tests = extra information
- **Participle clause:** similar to a relative clause, but uses a participle to provide additional information - a participle being a verb ending in the "ing" suffix
  - "Andrés, eating grapes, choked and died." "Eating" = participle and "eating grapes" = participle clause
- **Temporal clause:** provides time for when something happened
  - "When Lady Gaga comes to town, I'm going to dress up as an egg." The time I'll dress up as an egg = "when Lady Gaga comes to town" (temporal clause)
- **Causal clause:** provides cause of action
  - "Because he saw a clown, he peed his pants." Seeing the clown caused him to pee his pants
- **Contrast clause:** provides contextual information, making events of the main clause unexpected
  - "Although I'm not a superstar, I'm still divalicious." Words like "although," "however," "regardless of" = contrast
- **Conditional clause:** states that events of the main clause are dependent on something else (the **effect** of something else happening)
  - "If I meet Zayn Malik, I'm going to give him my number." "If" = the conditional state. In general, look for "if/then" sentences
- **TIP:** Try reading the sentence without the information set off by commas. If it still makes sense afterwards, then the information was non-essential

- **Comma + Coordinating Conjunction**

- Commas connect two clauses that could be complete sentences on their own. This can ONLY be done when the two sentences are closely related
  - The sentences “Ani drinks coffee every day” and “She’s addicted to caffeine” could be joined since both relate to Ani’s relationship with coffee
  - However, “I never miss an episode of The Walking Dead” and “Conrad will go to Oologah, Oklahoma in October” have absolutely nothing to do with each other, so it doesn’t make sense to combine these sentences
- IMPORTANT: For a comma to connect two complete sentences, the comma **must be followed by a FANBOYS conjunction**
- FANBOYS stands for:
  - **F**or, **A**nd, **N**or, **B**ut, **O**r, **Y**et, **S**o
- Example 1:
  - Clauses:
    - “The dj started playing her set shortly after they turned up.”
      - “the dj” is the subject, “started” is the verb, and it represents a complete thought = independent clause
    - “It took them longer than usual to finish their Chipotle bowls.”
      - “it” is the subject, “took” is the verb, and it also represents a complete thought = independent clause
  - We can now join these two clauses with a comma + FANBOYS
    - “The dj started shortly after they turned up, for it took them longer than usual to finish their Chipotle bowls.” “For” fits best since the two clauses appear to have a causal relationship
- Example 2:
  - “They left in the middle of the lecture and then called their friends to let them know how savage they were.”
    - “And” is a coordinating conjunction, but why isn’t there a comma before it?
- **Remember: the purpose of this type of comma is to connect two independent clauses.** Delete “and,” ask yourself, can I make these two clauses into separate sentences? “they” is the subject, “left” is the verb, and

it represents a complete thought, so the first part is an independent clause. In the second part, there's a verb, but no subject. Because it isn't an independent clause, you don't need a comma in this sentence

## **APOSTROPHES**

- Apostrophes are used in two ways, either as contractions or to show possession
- Contractions are when two words are combined into a single word. The apostrophe typically replaces the dropped vowel. Let's look at a few examples
  - "It's" is made of "it" and "is," where the "i" in "is" is dropped
  - "They're" is "they" and "are" combined, where the "a" in "are" is dropped
  - "Doesn't" is the contraction for "does" and "not," where the "o" in "not" is dropped
  - Notable contractions that behave weirdly are "have," "has" (since the "h" is dropped as well as the "a" in both, like in "I've" and "she's"), and "ain't." I could go into the history of the word "ain't," but it's safe to say you will NOT be tested on this word in the ACT, so knowledge of its history is unnecessary
- Possession in English is often marked by an 's after the possessor (e.g. "the boy's dog")
  - Singular nouns that end in an -s also use 's. So the possessive for "Jess," is "Jess's."
  - However, for plural nouns that end in an -s only add an apostrophe. The possessive for the plural noun "schools" is "schools'."
  - Be careful though! If the noun has a modifier of any kind after it, the 's attaches itself to the **end of the modifier**:
    - Example 1: "The Queen of England's domain," not "The Queen's of England domain."
    - Example 2: "The girl with the fur coat's dog," not "The girl's with the fur coat dog."
    - Example 3: "The pirates of the ship's treasure," not "The pirates' of the ship treasure."
  - There are some exceptions for when a possessive **is not represented with an apostrophe-s**

- The most commonly mistaken is the possessive “it”. As mentioned before, “it’s” is the contraction for “it” and “is.” To make the possessive for it, simply add -s **without** an apostrophe, “its”
- The second is the possessive for “who.” “Who’s” is the contraction for “who” and “is.” Instead of simply adding -s to make the possessive though, you need to add -se, so it’s “whose”
- Similar mistakes are made with the possessives for “you” and “they.” Neither of these possessives have an apostrophe (“your” and “their”), yet their contracted forms do (“you’re” and “they’re”)
- These four pronouns are tricky and often confuse people. It is worth repeating one more time: “it’s,” “who’s,” “you’re,” and “they’re” are **contractions**, and “its,” “whose,” “your,” and “their” are **possessives**

## COLONS, SEMICOLONS, AND DASHES

- **Colons**

- Colons introduce or emphasize a phrase, example, reason, or question
- Colons are often used in titles. Thomas L. Friedman used a colon in the title of his book, “The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century.” You hopefully correctly identified the first clause, “the world is flat,” as an independent clause. It contains a subject, “the world,” a verb “is”, and is a complete thought. The second clause may be either dependent or independent, but the **first clause must be independent**

- **Semicolons**

- Semicolons have two functions:
  - The first function is combining two closely-related sentences. It’s worth noting that this usage is interchangeable with the comma + FANBOYS conjunction. Be careful though, you **do not need a coordinating conjunction if you use a semicolon instead of a comma**
    - “I love tea; I drink a cup every morning.”
  - The second function is separating components in a list of lists
- “Joe bought eggs, milk, and bread; Amy bought chocolate, peanut butter, and sugar; and Jane bought rice, wheat, and beef.” There are three separate, yet

related lists in this sentence. Instead of having three separate sentences with a repetitive structure, we simply separated them with a semicolon

- **Dashes**

- Dashes also have a few different functions:
  - A single dash is used the same way as a colon, where the first clause must be an independent clause, but the second may be either dependent or independent. Usually used for emphasis.
  - A double dash sets off information in the same way commas do. By double dashes, we mean that there are two within a sentence
- Let's look at some examples that use dashes:
  - Single dash: "Ms. Wilson prepared her students for all aspects of the test - multiple choice, FROs, and DBQs."
  - Double dash: "Clara - the fastest runner in the state - qualified for nationals."
- Dashes can also be used to show hesitation or a break in thought. This typically shows up in a dialogue:
  - "He had black - no, wait, blue - jeans." Right after saying the color of his jeans was black, the speaker suddenly remembered they were in fact blue

## **Periods, Question Marks, and Exclamation Marks**

- Periods, question marks, and exclamation points all end sentences
- Punctuation always goes inside quotation marks
- Periods
  - Periods are neutral. They are the default if neither a question mark nor an exclamation point makes sense
    - "This sentence ends with a period." It wouldn't make sense to use a question mark for this sentence since it's clearly a statement. An exclamation point wouldn't make sense either as it isn't a statement that elicits great excitement
- Question Marks

- Question marks indicate and end questions
- Typically, questions will begin with a question word:
  - Who, where, what, which, when, why, how
- “When do you use a question mark?” Answer: for that sentence and any other inquiry type
- Exclamation Marks
  - Exclamation points are used to express high levels of emotion or excitement
    - “I can’t believe that happened!”
  - The exclamation point is the only punctuation mark linked to emotions. Therefore, it is most frequently used in dialogue, or sometimes when addressing the reader