

## Punctuation

Sentences can take on very different meanings depending on how you punctuate them. For example: *Anne Marie and I went bowling.* Did two people (Anne Marie and I) or three people (Anne, Marie and I) go bowling? You need to know the basic uses below in order to ensure that your reader will understand what you mean.

**Periods**—end a sentence that either makes a statement (declarative) or gives a mild command (imperative).

**Commas**—have many uses

1. to separate words in a series
2. to separate two independent clauses joined by *but, or, yet, so, and, for, not.*
3. to separate an explanatory phrase, as in *Bilbo, a golden retriever, was always...*
4. to separate clauses that aren't essential to the meaning of the sentence, as in *Rob, who owns three homes, is the CEO of the SAM corporation.* Because the sentence is about Rob being a CEO, you need to separate out the clause about his three homes.
5. in addresses, dates and in the greeting and ending of informal letters:
  - a. *21 Maple Road, Santa Fe, NM 87505*
  - b. *Monday, March 14, 2005*
  - c. *Dear Thelma,*
  - d. *Best Wishes, Louise*

**Colons**—are used to introduce explanations, lists, and quotations. They are often used in the greeting line of a business letter.

1. *She was so happy at her new school: she loved her room mate, her classes, and her new city.*
2. *The marketing list seemed so short: peas, carrots, corn, milk and eggs.*
3. *Bill Gates gathered his employees and told them the following: "Make sure you eat your peas and carrots."*
4. *Dear Mr. Spielberg:*

**Semicolons**—separate independent clauses that are closely related and belong in one sentence but which are not joined by a conjunction, as in *The cat jumped over the moon; the dog quickly followed her.*

**Apostrophes**—show possession

1. *Jamie's car* (the car possessed by Jamie)
2. *The boys' car* (one car owned by two boys)
3. *Jamie Jones's car* (when a singular noun ends in "s", put the apostrophe between the two s's)

Apostrophes are also used to replace letters in a contraction, as in *don't* (do not), *can't* (can not), *I'll* (I will) and *you've* (you have).

**Quotation Marks**—enclose direct quotations of something someone said. Periods and commas are put inside the quotation marks; colons and semicolons always appear outside the quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation points go within or without dependent on the context of the words being quoted, as in *She said, "Surprise!"* and *Did she say "Hello"?*

Single quotation marks are used for quotations within quotations, as in *With bated breath, Barb said "She yelled 'Surprise!' to all of us and then ran out of the room."*

Quotation marks are also used to denote titles of most everything but books, and to denote slang words, as in *Sally always says "whatever" when she doesn't know what else to say.*

**Parentheses**—provide information or an explanation that doesn't fit with the flow of the sentence, but which you want to give the reader. If the parentheses are within a sentence do not capitalize the first word or use a period; however, you should use question marks or exclamation marks if appropriate.

