

# Punctuation Rules

The key to punctuation perfection is to constantly ask yourself, “Where is the sentence?” If it is not a sentence, is it a phrase? Then, ask yourself, “HOW can I turn it into a sentence?”

**Comma List** – not on the ACT unless a question has two adjectives together that need a comma separating them.

- *The young, immature student skipped school.*

**Conjunction** - If you have a conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) separating two complete sentences, then you need a comma before the conjunction. If you don’t have a complete sentence on both sides of the conjunction, NO comma is required

- *The movie was hilarious, and the tickets were on sale*
- *She can ride a bike to work, or she can take the bus*

**Semi-colon** -Semicolons act like a period by separating two (complete!) sentences.

- *The hour is over; it is time to put down your pencils and stop working*
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**Comma Sandwich** - Two commas are used to surround, or “sandwich” clauses, phrases, or words that are not essential to the sentence’s meaning. You can remove everything between the “sandwiched” commas

- *Jack, who likes to read, won the essay contest– “Jack won the essay contest” still makes sense*

**ONE comma rule:** Beginning and Ending with Phrases (and Clauses) - One comma is used to separate a phrase or clause from the beginning or ending of a sentence.

- An introductory phrase or clause must modify the subject
- Clauses or phrases that come at the end of the sentence must modify the object.
- *She went to see her grandma, a nice lady*– A nice lady (one comma) modifies her grandma
- *A clumsy girl, Sarah didn’t like wearing heels*– A clumsy girl (one comma) modifies Sarah

**Colon:** A colon separates a sentence from either a phrase or another sentence

Colons are used to indicate that an explanation is to follow.

- *I have been working since I was 16: I need to pay for college and wanted to start saving early.* (sentence:sentence)
- *The town reminded me of my childhood vacations: both were on the beach* (sentence:phrase)

Colons are used to indicate a definition or example.

- *I have several favorite games: Pictionary, Rummy, Monopoly.* (example)
- *This house has everything I need: two bedrooms, a backyard, and a garage.*

**Dash:** A dash is a strong comma. Dashes often “blanket” a phrase on the ACT/SAT. A dash can never be paired with a comma.

**Apostrophes:**

- With singular nouns not ending in s, add an apostrophe and “s” (*girl’s book*)
- With plural nouns ending in s, add an apostrophe after the “s” (*girls’ books*)
- With plural nouns not ending in “s”, add an apostrophe and “s” (*women’s books*)
- MEMORIZE THESE EXCEPTIONS:

It’s = it is	its=ownership
Who’s=who is	whose=ownership
You’re= you are	your=ownership
There’s= there is	theirs=ownership