

Punctuation in English

(based on the book **BUGs in Writing, Revised Edition:
A Guide do Debugging your prose (Second
Edition)**, by Lyn Dupré, February 1998)

Semicolon (;)

- Joins two sentences that are strongly related and that are part of a unique thought.

This machine is difficult to use; for example, it crashes whenever you change windows.

This interface is not particularly friendly—none of the command names mean anything in English.

Holly and Misha cooked yet another meal—and refused to let anyone help them to wash the dishes.

- Before complete sentences starting with “for example” and “that is”. If is not a complete sentence, use dashes.

This equation is difficult to parse; that is, I cannot figure out what it is supposed to do.

Brian supposed it was a good idea to have somebody looking after the details—for example, sending out invoices.

Colon (:)

- Indicates that the text that comes next expands or explains the previous text.

- At the end of a sentence followed by a list:

This book does not assume that you know the basic skills needed to write a manuscript: how to form a sentence, how to use words correctly and precisely, and how to laugh at your own errors.

- At the end of a sentence that is followed by a text that explains the previous sentence.

Lyn could tell that BB was going into heat: BB had been howling and yowling the entire night through.

Note: Use capital letter at the beginning of a sentence that follows the colon. Do not use capital letter if what follows is a list, even if its members are full sentences.

Sue was fiddling in the kitchen again: This time, she was making double-chocolate mousse.

- **When not to use colon:**
- In the middle of a sentence just because it is followed by a list.
Jeff's few items of furniture were limited to a couch, a chair, and a bed.

To create a documentation copy of a worksheet you

- 1. Use /Worksheet Global Format Text to set the global format to Text.*
- 2. Use /Range Format Reset P1 . . X15 and ENTER to reset all the Range formats back to Global settings.*

Comma (,)

- A comma must be used to make a short pause.
- Before “and” or “or” in a list containing several items.

I don't want any coffee, tea, or milk.

Lyn, Red, and BB are all included in the package.

Please read pages 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8.

- Before a word or an introductory word or phrase:

Greg was hungry; however, he remained calm.

In summary, we can unwelcome email in one of two ways.

By the time that Lyn reached Wall Street Gunnar, she had already eaten blue-corn patties with mango sauce.

- Before and after sentences that contain the word *that*.
I want you to know that, whatever happens, I will never let another man put ice on my bruised fingers.
Please remember that, despite recent harrowing events, this woman has always functioned without pulling out her hair.
- When there is a logical pause, or when you start a thought:
Lyn wanted to live with goats, so she moved to Oregon.

- **Do not use comma:**

- To join two sentences that should be separated by a “;” or “.”.

** A comma splice is a joining of two sentences by a comma and an and, and this sentence is an example.*

Note that a semicolon can be used to join two sentences; this sentence is an example.

I had been sleeping all night in the fragrant bedroom, with BB at my feet, and I was fully rested. I got up and stretched luxuriously; suddenly, the room turned inside out.

Hyphen (-)

- Joins two words that modify a third one.
- Between two words that together form an adjective:
The viscous-forming process involves melting and shaping of a viscous silicate.
Figure 8.2 shows sodium-fluoride sintering.

- **Do not use hyphen:**

- Between two words that together form a noun, or between two words that constitute an adjective-noun pair.

We need to develop a more intuitive front end.

This car has a dented back end.

The front-end code was written by a lunatic.

- Between two words that together describe an activity.

Decision making under uncertainty can be stressful.

Love making under a starry sky can be thrilling.

- However, when the words function as an adjective, the hyphen must be used:

Love-making paradises are scary.

- When a unique word modifies a term composed of two words:

The red fire engine took off with great commotion.

The green dragon lady waltzed down the street in the arms of the blue china dog.

- We can compare the hyphen in composed adjectives with parentheses in Mathematics:

Internet-specific advisory information, such as ICMP error messages, also may be read from raw sockets.

Written language is a rule-based system.

A moldy style manual can be soporific reading, although it may be a fabulous referent.

The discussion starts at the system-call level.

Lyn offered Max a half baked potato for dinner.

- When the first word of the composed adjective ends in *ly*.
You should avoid writing badly formed sentences.
You should never use grossly deformed pencils.
Max likes to work with a highly motivated team.
- When the first word of the composed adjective is *more*, *most*, *less* or *least*.
Can you imagine a less appealing creature?
I cannot imagine a more attractive dog.

- When the adjective comes after the name it is modifying:.

This programming system is not user friendly.

This user-friendly interface is hypnotic.

Writing well is worth the effort, although it can be time consuming.

- To join several adjectives to form a unique composed adjective (but this not a good practice)

Local-area-network connections are easy to install.

Connections for local-area networks are easy to install.

Be careful not to make an operating-system-command error.

Be careful not to make an error in an operating-system command.

en dash (–)

- To indicate limits and to denote pairs of equal importance to form an adjective.
- To indicate limits.

Read Chapters 4–12.

Skip Exercises 4 through 12.

The wombats weighed 40–70 pounds each.

The children weighed 40 to 70 pounds each.

- To indicate a pair of equal weight functioning as an adjective.
Have you heard of the work–lay balance?
Certain input–output devices require exclusive use of the bus when they are doing data transfers.
They have a love–rate relationship.
If you travel the New York–Los Angeles route, you can take a direct hit.

em dash (—)

- To indicate a thought that is not a crucial part of the sentence. It may work as a strong comma or a semicolon.
- In the middle of a sentence to include a thought that is slightly tangential to the subject, but to which you may want to call attention.

Max had many sources of joy—his company, his house, his car, and his socks—so he managed to survive from one day to the next.

Minsky, Simon, Newell, and McCarthy—all grand men, as we know—decide to play an intelligent game.

Various towers—for example, those of Hanoi—have featured largely as well.

Max had all the necessities of life—that is, food, shelter, warmth, and on-demand snuggles.

- **Note:** We should not use more than two dashes in the same sentence. We could use parenthesis or commas instead. You can also break the sentences in two, and use semicolon and dash in each one.

Parentheses ()

- To give explanations that are not crucial to the sentence.
- *Lyn is no longer nulliparous (she has had a baby).*
Jim does the shopping (at the market), and Lyn creates a meal from whatever she finds in the kitchen.
In 1993, (Goldstein et al.) reported that all authors experience episodes of psychosis.

Exclamation mark (!)

- Used to denote surprise.
- *“Dammit!” roared Lyn, “I hate waiting for people who cannot be bothered to be on time.”*
I am overwhelmed! How can you be so good to me, when I continually eat pretzels in bed?
- **Note:** We don’t use comma, semicolon, full stop and question mark with exclamation mark.
“Well, tiddlywinks to you, too!” reorted Lyn.
The earth moved! And then the waterbed collapsed.

Quotation mark (“”)

- When you are repeating the source.

The New Yourk Times reported “a calamity of severe proportions” [NYer Times, 8 May 1967, page F.1].

- Writing a dialogue.

“I don’t have time”, Max squeaked. “Can’t you handle the disaster relief yourself?”

- To indicate sarcasm.

The president's "honesty" consisted of a series of contradictory press releases.

- To refer to a term or word, and not to its meaning. Italics can also be used.

"Data" is a plural.

- To refer to a list of words.

Enter the string "grievous_bodily_harm"; then, press "return".

Ellipsis (...)

- To indicate missing words in the middle of a sentence.

Martha said, let's edit the review as follows: "this is... the best... play ever... written... I recommend... see it."

Peter scolded, "This manuscript needs plenty of work, such as...; it also needs repagination."