Punctuation

Periods

Use a period at the end of a complete sentence that is a statement. If the last word in the sentence ends in a period, do not follow it with another period. In English use the period after an indirect question.

Commas

To avoid confusion, use commas to separate words and word groups with a series of three or more. Use a comma to separate two adjectives when the word *and* can be inserted between them. Use a comma when an *-ly* adjective is used with other adjectives. Use commas before or surrounding the name or title of a person directly addressed. Use a comma to separate the day of the month from the year and after the year. If any part of the date is omitted, leave out the comma. Use a comma to separate the city from the state and after the state in a document. If you use the two-letter capitalized form of a state in a document, you do not need a comma after the state. Use commas to surround degrees or titles used with names.

Commas are no longer required around *Jr.* and *Sr.* Commas never set off *II, III,* and so forth. Use commas to set off expressions that interrupt sentence flow. When starting a sentence with a weak clause, use a comma after it. Conversely, do not use a comma when the sentence starts with a strong clause followed by a weak clause. Use a comma after phrases of more than three words that begin a sentence. If the phrase has fewer than three words, the comma is optional.

If something or someone is sufficiently identified, the description following it is considered non-essential and should be surrounded by commas. Use a comma to separate two strong clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction--*and, or, but, for, nor.* You can omit the comma if the clauses are both short. Use the comma to separate two sentences if it will help avoid confusion. If the subject does not appear in front of the second verb, do not use a comma.

 Use commas to introduce or interrupt direct quotations shorter than three lines. Use a comma to separate a statement from a question. Use a comma to separate contrasting parts of a sentence. Use a comma when beginning sentences with introductory words such as *well, now,* or *yes.* Use commas surrounding words such as *therefore* and *however* when they are used as interrupters. Use either a comma or a semicolon before introductory words such as *namely, that is, i.e., for example, e.g.,* or *for instance* when they are followed by a series of items. Use a comma after the introductory word.

Semicolons

Use a semicolon in place of a period to separate two sentences where the conjunction has been left out. It is preferable to use a semicolon before introductory words such as *namely, however, therefore, that is, i.e., for example, e.g.,* or *for instance* when they introduce a complete sentence. It is also preferable to use a comma after the introductory word. Use either a semicolon or a comma before introductory words such as *namely, however, therefore, that is, i.e., for example, e.g.,* or *for instance* when they introduce a list following a complete sentence. Use a comma after the introductory word. Use the semicolon to separate units of a series when one or more of the units contain commas. Use the semicolon between two sentences joined by a coordinating conjunction when one or more commas appear in the first sentence.

Apostrophes

Use the apostrophe with contractions. The apostrophe is always placed at the spot where the letter(s) has been removed. Use the apostrophe to show possession. Place the apostrophe before the *s* to show singular possession. Although names ending in *s* or an *s* sound are not required to have the second *s* added in possessive form, it is preferred. Use the apostrophe where the noun that should follow is implied. To show plural possession, make the noun plural first. Then immediately use the apostrophe. Do not use an apostrophe for the plural of a name.

With a singular compound noun, show possession with *'s* at the end of the word. f the compound noun is plural, form the plural first and then use the apostrophe. Use the apostrophe and *s* after the second name only if two people possess the same item.

Never use an apostrophe with possessive pronouns: *his, hers, its, theirs, ours, yours, whose*. They already show possession so they do not require an apostrophe. The only time an apostrophe is used for *it's* is when it is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*. The plurals for capital letters and numbers used as nouns are not formed with apostrophes. You need to use the apostrophe to indicate the plural of *zero* or it will look like the word *Os*. To be consistent within a sentence, you would also use the apostrophe to indicate the plural of *6's*. Use the possessive case in front of a gerund *(-ing word)*. If the gerund has a pronoun in front of it, use the possessive form of that pronoun.

Hyphens

Between words: To check whether a compound noun is two words, one word, or hyphenated, you may need to look it up in the dictionary. If you can't find the word in the dictionary, treat the noun as separate words. Phrases that have verb, noun, and adjective forms should appear as separate words when used as verbs and as one word when used as nouns or adjectives.

Compound verbs are either hyphenated or appear as one word. If you do not find the verb in the dictionary, hyphenate it. Generally, hyphenate between two or more adjectives when they come before a noun and act as a single idea. When adverbs not ending in *-ly* are used as compound words in front of a noun, hyphenate.

When the combination of words is used after the noun, do not hyphenate. Remember to use a comma, not a hyphen, between two adjectives when you could have used *and* between them. Hyphenate all compound numbers from *twenty-one* through *ninety-nine*. Hyphenate all spelled-out fractions.

With prefixes: The current trend is to do away with unnecessary hyphens. Therefore, attach most prefixes and suffixes onto root words without a hyphen. Hyphenate prefixes when they come before proper nouns. Hyphenate prefixes ending in an *a* or *i* only when the root word begins with the same letter. When a prefix ends in one vowel and a root word begins with a different vowel, generally attach them without a hyphen. Prefixes and root words that result in double *e's* and double *o's* are usually combined to form one word. Hyphenate all words beginning with *self* except for *selfish* and *selfless*. Use a hyphen with the prefix *ex*. Use the hyphen with the prefix *re* only when the *re* means *again* AND omitting the hyphen would cause confusion with another word.

(Smith, Brady. *Proofreading, Revising, and Editing Skills Success*, New York: LearningExpress, LLC, 2003.)