Perfect Punctuation
Part Two: The Comma, Dash and Parentheses

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Learning Outcomes for Part Two

By the end of this presentation, you should be able to:

- Understand how to use commas, dashes and parentheses in your writing.
- Know how to edit your writing for accuracy in comma use.
Overview of Screencast (Part Two)

1. Review seven rules for comma use.
2. Explain common comma errors.
3. Explain the difference between commas, dashes and parentheses.
**Comma Rule #1**

- Use a comma and one of the FANBOYS to join two independent clauses. The FANBOYS are *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.*

- Laura went to a lecture last night on the bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef, **and** she found the talk distressing.

- Large parts of the reef have died because of global warming, **but** many people feel powerless to change the situation.
Comma Rule #1 – Common Errors

- Using a comma alone (with no FANBOY) to join two independent clauses (comma splice)

  ✗ Last summer we went to the Roger’s Cup in Toronto, we saw some great matches.

  ✓ Last summer we went to the Roger’s Cup in Toronto, and we saw some great matches.
Comma Rule #1 – Common Errors cont’d

- Using a comma before a FANBOY when you have only one subject and one independent clause. In the incorrect example below, there is only one subject – Erin and Joel. There is no subject before but, so there should be no comma in front of it.

  - Erin and Joel tried hard to figure out the math problem, but gave up in the end.
  - Erin and Joel tried hard to figure out the math problem but gave up in the end.
  - Erin and Joel tried hard to figure out the math problem, but they gave up in the end.
Comma Rule #1 – Common Errors cont’d

- Omitting the comma when using a FANBOY to join two clauses.

  - Incorrect: Saskatchewan’s economy did not suffer during the 2008 global recession but it has not escaped the world decline in oil prices.

  - Correct: Saskatchewan’s economy did not suffer during the 2008 global recession, but it has not escaped the world decline in oil prices.
Comma Rule #2

- Use commas to set off adverbs and phrases in the middle or at the end of an independent clause. (“Therefore” is an exception.)

- Cheaper tickets were available. We decided, **however**, to buy the box seats.

- Cheaper tickets were available. We decided to buy the box seats, **however**.

- A trip to Wimbledon to see tennis would have been too expensive. We **therefore** decided to go to Toronto instead.
Comma Rule #2 – Common Errors

- Not inserting commas around common adverbs

X I was **however** relieved to find that good seats were still available for the Roger’s Cup.

✓ I was, **however**, relieved to find that good seats were still available for the Roger’s Cup.
Comma Rule #3

- Insert a comma after introductory words, phrases, and dependent clauses that precede the subject.

- Running across the Broadway bridge, Anne felt a sharp pain in her ankle.
- When she looked at her ankle, she saw that it was swollen.
- Because she couldn’t run any further, she turned around and limped back home.
Exception to Comma Rule #3: Short Phrases

- You may omit the comma after a short phrase at the beginning of a sentence, but you must use a comma after interjections such as *in fact* and *indeed*. You also need to include commas after most adverbs and adverb phrases.

  ✓ **In 1999** my daughter was born. (Comma “after 1999” optional)

  ✓ **In the end** we decided to stay. (Comma after “in the end” optional)

  ✓ **In fact**, the situation has worsened.

  ✓ **On the other hand**, we could stay in Saskatoon for another two years.
Comma Rule #3 – Common Errors

- Inserting a comma in front of a subordinate conjunction when the dependent clause *follows* the main clause. Exceptions are *which, while, whereas, although* and *as*.

  - ✗ White pelicans are often seen at the Saskatoon weir, **because** they are attracted to the abundant fish found in the swirling waters.

  ✔ White pelicans are often seen at the Saskatoon weir **because** they are attracted to the abundant fish found in the swirling waters.
Comma Rule #3 – Common Errors cont’d

- Inserting a period or a semi-colon after a dependent clause, creating a sentence fragment.

  X  Although Sarah liked living in Saskatoon; she missed her family.

  ✓ Although Sarah liked living in Saskatoon, she missed her family.
Comma Rule #4

- Use commas to set off non-essential phrases and clauses. Don’t use commas around essential phrases and clauses. (Use *which* to begin non-essential clauses; use *that* to begin essential clauses; *who* can be used with both.)

  - Gina’s house, *which has a new roof*, is near the university.
  - The students *who left early* avoided getting soaked in the heavy rain.
  - The subway car *that had a brake problem* was taken out of service.
Comma Rule #4 – Common Errors

- Omitting commas around non-essential clauses and putting them around essential clauses. Using *that* instead of *which* and vice versa.
  - ❌ Because he was ill, Lin missed his evening class that he had been attending since January.
  - ✔ Because he was ill, Lin missed his evening class, which he had been attending since January.

- The first-year students, who Amy saw at the Writing Centre yesterday, had many writing problems.
  - ❌ The first-year students, who Amy saw at the Writing Centre yesterday, had many writing problems.
  - ✔ The first-year students who Amy saw at the Writing Centre yesterday had many writing problems.
Comma Rule #5

- Use commas between three or more words, phrases, or clauses in a series. The final comma before *and* is optional. It is known as the serial or Oxford comma.

  ✅ Keith bought milk, bread, and eggs at the store.

  ✅ The Canadian government consists of the executive branch, the legislature, and the judiciary.

  ✅ The violinist played the sonata, the judges adjudicated it, and the audience waited for the mark to be posted.
Comma Rule #5 – Common Errors

- Using a comma to separate items (e.g., clauses, subjects, verbs, and objects) when there are only two items

  X The violinist played a solo, the judges adjudicated it.
  ✓ The violinist played a solo, and the judges adjudicated it.

  X The violinist, and the cellist played a duet.
  ✓ The violinist and the cellist played a duet.
Comma Rule #6

- **Use commas to separate coordinate adjectives but no commas to separate cumulative adjectives.** Ask these questions: 1) Can I put *and* between the adjectives, and 2) Can I reverse the order of the adjectives? If the answer is *yes* to both, you know you have coordinate adjectives.

- Lynn is a **hard-working, ambitious** student (coordinate)
- John saw an **endangered white** rhinoceros at the zoo. (cumulative)
Comma Rule #7

- Include or exclude a comma to reduce confusion and increase clarity.

X Several prominent people were invited to speak, including human rights advocates, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin.

✓ Several prominent people were invited to speak, including human rights advocates, Donald Trump, and Vladimir Putin.
Parentheses, Commas, and Dashes

- Here is what Grammar Girl says: “Parentheses are the quiet whisper of an aside, commas are the conversational voice of a friend walking by your desk, and dashes are the yowl of a pirate dashing into a fray.”

- Everyone turned to look as the new faculty member (wearing a scarlet coat) entered the staffroom.

- Everyone turned to look as the new faculty member, wearing a scarlet coat, entered the staffroom.

- Everyone turned to look as the the new faculty member – wearing a scarlet coat – entered the staffroom.

Summary

- Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) to join two independent clauses.
- Use a comma to set off conjunctive adverbs (e.g., however) in the middle or at the end of a main clause, introductory words before the subject, non-essential phrases, coordinate adjectives, and lists.
- Dashes have more emphasis than commas, and commas have more than parentheses.