

HANDY PUNCTUATION REFERENCE

1. **Apostrophe ('):**
 - a) omission of letters as in contractions: *he's-he is / don't-do not / we're-we are*
 - b) to show possession: *car's horn / cars' horns / Harry's book / men's hats*
 - c) to show plurals of letters and numbers *t's / 3's*

2. **Colon (:):**
 - a) after the greeting on a business letter *Dear Sir:*
 - b) to introduce a list *The following are needed: books, pencils, erasers, and pens.*

3. **Comma (,):**
 - a) to separate two main clauses joined by *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so* (i.e. FANBOYS) *We rushed to the station, but the train had already left.*
 - b) to separate a dependent clause from a main clause when the dependent clause precedes the main clause *If it is a good day on Saturday, I will go to the football game.*

NOTE: There is no comma when the clause order is reversed.
I will go to the football game if it is a good day on Saturday.
 - c) to set off interrupting statements *He is, I believe, the best player on the team.*
 - d) to set off clauses beginning with *who, whom, or which* (relative clauses) when they are not absolutely necessary to identify or specify a particular person or thing *Mr. Jones, who lives on Market Street, crashed into a telephone pole while driving 90 miles per hour.*

NOTE: Clauses that begin with the word "that" usually are essential in identifying particular persons or things; therefore, they are not usually set off by commas *The car that he was driving before the accident was demolished.*
 - e) to set off an unnecessary restatement of someone's name (an appositive) *Mr. Smith, my father, is the man wearing a hat.*
 - f) after introductory words, such as *yes, no, first, second, etc.* *Yes, I'd like to go.*
 - g) to set off nouns in direct address *Mrs. Smith, have you visited the art museum? Have you heard, class, that the assignment is easy?*
 - h) in direct quotations *"I understand," he said, "that you intend to go to France."*
 - i) in dates, between the day and the year *November 7, 1980*
 - j) between cities and states *He lives in Wilmington, Delaware.*
 - k) to separate words in a series *I want milk, bread, butter, and cheese. He hoped that the war would end, that the crime rate would drop, and that his personal problems would be solved.*

4. **Dash (—):**
- a) to show a sudden break in thought *Would you mind terribly passing the cream and—My goodness! Where's my purse?*
 - b) to show emphasis before an appositive *Money, fame, power—none of those things are important without health.*
5. **Exclamation Point (!):**
- a) after emphatic statements *Help! Be careful!*
6. **Hyphen (-):**
- a) to express the idea of a unit *I double-parked. (verb) / He owns a well-built house. (adjective)*
 - b) to avoid ambiguity *re-sign the petition (compare with resign from office)*
 - c) if a word must be broken at the end of a line, use a hyphen between syllables
7. **Period (.):**
- a) at the end of statements *John has measles.*
 - b) after initials and abbreviations *Dr. Jones, Ph.D.*
 - c) after numbers and in decimals *1. / 2. / 3. / 0.5 / 1.5*
8. **Question Mark (?):**
- a) at the end of direct questions *What is he doing?*
BUT not after indirect questions *He asked what it was.*
9. **Quotation Mark ("):**
- a) the exact words of a speaker *"Let's go there next week," he said.*
 - b) an interrupted quotation *"Okay," yelled the crook, "hands up!"*
 - c) titles of poems, songs, stories, chapters, articles *"Rip Van Winkle"*
10. **Semicolon (;):**
- a) to separate two closely related main (or independent) clauses which do not have any other joining word *One is small; the other is large.*
 - b) in compound sentences before transition words, such as furthermore, however, nevertheless, therefore, consequently, etc. *Our plane was three hours late; consequently, we did not arrive on time.*
11. **Underlining ():**
- a) titles of magazines, newspapers, books, movies, and plays *He likes to read the New York Times.*