

Explore

Punctuation

We use a traffic light analogy to help explain punctuation. When you need to come to a complete stop while reading, you are separating two independent clauses. Therefore, we call the punctuation used to separate these clauses stop punctuation.

After an Introductory Idea

Ask students whether *Originally influenced by punk rock bands* is a dependent clause or a phrase. Have students give a reason to support their response.

Answer:

Originally influenced by punk rock bands, the members of U2 believed that music proficiency was not necessarily required to be successful.

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PUNCTUATION

Sentences are composed of clauses and phrases "glued" together using punctuation.

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to

- determine whether to use a comma, dash, colon, apostrophe, period, or semi-colon
- write sentences by combining clauses and phrases using appropriate punctuation

Stop Punctuation

As we discussed in Chapter 3, you can combine two independent clauses by using a period, semi-colon, or a comma followed by FANBOYS (a coordinating conjunction). We're going to call punctuation like this **stop punctuation**. Stop punctuation requires the reader to come to a full stop in before moving on to the next idea. The question mark and exclamation mark are also stop punctuation.

When stop punctuation is not used between two independent clauses, you get a run-on sentence. For example:

The band now known as U2 was formed in 1976 their original name was Feedback.

This is a run-on sentence because there are two independent clauses connected without any stop punctuation. In order to correct this problem, you could use a period:

The band now known as U2 was formed in 1976. Their original name was Feedback.

Another option is to use a semi-colon:

The band now known as U2 was formed in 1976; their original name was Feedback.

On the ACT, a period and semi-colon are equivalent. Another option would be to use a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction. Remember, the coordinating conjunctions are the FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). Look at the example below:

The band now known as U2 was formed in 1976, but their original name was Feedback.

Commas

Stop punctuation can only be used between two independent clauses. When one of the ideas in a sentence is a dependent clause or phrase, you need to use different punctuation. Commas are one of the punctuations that may be used. If periods are stoplights, then commas are more like blinking yellow lights: you should slow down before going on. There are four main instances when commas are used, let's explore each one.

After an Introductory Idea

As we mentioned in Chapter 3, if you have a dependent clause or phrase acting as an introductory idea before an independent clause, you need to use a comma to separate these two ideas. Look at the example below and underline the introductory idea.

Originally influenced by punk rock bands, the members of U2 believed that music proficiency was not necessarily required to be successful.

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In the sentence above, the introductory idea is "Originally influenced by punk rock bands." This information helps explain why the band thought the way that they did. Notice that a comma follows the introductory idea.

Before and After Unnecessary Information

Another instance when commas are used is to set off unnecessary information. These may be appositives (phrases that rename something right next to it) or extra information. Look at the example below and underline the unnecessary information.

The band's first international hit wasn't until their third album, *War*.

In this sentence, the unnecessary information (in the form of an appositive) is *War*. A comma precedes this information. Since it comes at the end of the sentence, it is followed with a period. Look at the example below:

The band's first international hit, "New Year's Day," wasn't until their third album, and its success led to sold out concerts in Europe and the U.S.

In this example, the unnecessary information is placed in the middle of the sentence. It is now preceded and followed by a comma. Remember, in order to determine whether information is necessary you can use the horizontal line test that was described in Chapter 3.

After Every Item in a List

Commas also are necessary in a list. When you have a list of three or more items, a comma needs to follow each item (except for the last one). Underline the list in the example below.

The Joshua Tree was influenced by blues, folk, and gospel music.

There are three items in the list: blues, folk, and gospel (music). Notice that a comma precedes the "and."

Between a List of Two Things

A less known comma rule states that commas can be used to separate two items (typically adjectives) in a list. Underline the items in the list below.

For *The Unforgettable Fire*, Larry Mullen laid down looser and funkier drum tracks.

The items in the list in this sentence are *looser* and *funkier*. This sentence could be rewritten using a comma to say:

For *The Unforgettable Fire*, Larry Mullen laid down looser, funkier drum tracks.

Notice that the word "and" is omitted and replaced with a comma.

Uses for Commas

- After an introductory idea
- To set off unnecessary information
- After every item in a list
- Between a list of two things
- With FANBOYS as STOP punctuation

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When students underline the unnecessary information, ask them how they decided that it was unnecessary. If students respond that it's because the phrase is preceded by a comma, ask them how they can figure out whether or not information is unnecessary even when there isn't a comma. Use this as an opportunity to remind students of the horizontal line test.

You can mention to advanced students that instead of using a pair of commas to set off unnecessary information, a pair of dashes may also be used. You should also tell them, though, that the ACT will try to trick them by combining one dash and one comma in the wrong answers.

After Every Item in a List

It's important to point out that in a list of two things, a comma can be used or the word *and* can be used, but they cannot be used together. On the other hand, when there are three or more items in a list, a comma always precedes the *and*. Therefore, it's important that students identify the items in a list before determining whether a comma is needed in front of the *and*.

Colons and Dashes

Colons (:) and single dashes (—) are less common types of punctuation, but they are occasionally useful when writing and answering ACT English questions. The rules for using a colon or single dash are the same. The punctuation must be preceded by an independent clause. The idea that follows the punctuation needs to be a list, example, or explanation. Look at the examples below.

U2 has done collaborations with many well-known bands and artists: Green Day, Bob Dylan, and R.E.M.

U2 has done collaborations with many well-known bands and artists: Green Day, Bob Dylan, and R.E.M. have all worked with U2 at one time or another.

The list that follows the colon in the first sentence contains examples of the different bands and artists. In the second example, two independent clauses are joined together as if a semi-colon was between them. These sentences could also be correctly written with a dash:

U2 has done collaborations with many well-known bands and artists—Green Day, Bob Dylan, and R.E.M.

U2 has done collaborations with many well-known bands and artists— Green Day, Bob Dylan, and R.E.M. have all worked with U2 at one time or another.

Apostrophes

The last type of punctuation we will discuss is apostrophes. Apostrophes have two uses: to show **possession** and for **contractions**. Contractions are words that are shortened versions of two words. For example, the word "can't" is a contraction for "cannot." What words make up the contraction in the sentence below?

Let's not listen to "A Beautiful Day"—I've heard it too many times.

In this example, the contraction *let's* stands for *let us*. If you are unsure whether to use a contraction, you should expand it out into its two words to see if it makes sense in the sentence. Look at the example below.

"Do They Know It's Christmas?" was a song recorded by many artists, including U2, to raise funds for famine in Ethiopia.

Whenever an apostrophe is attached to a pronoun, it's being used as a contraction and you can expand it out to make sure it's being used appropriately. If the contraction does not make sense in the sentence, then you need to use the possessive form of the pronoun. For the pronoun *it*, the possessive form is *its* (no apostrophe). Chapter 6 will discuss possessive pronouns in more detail.

Apostrophes are also used to show possession when attached to a noun. In order to use an apostrophe to show possession, a noun or a modifier + a noun must follow it (only nouns can be possessed). Look at the example below:

The album's four singles all won Grammy Awards.

In this example the *album* possesses the *singles*. In this instance, the adjective *four* is describing the *singles*. The *album* is a singular noun. When showing possession with a plural noun that ends in "s," you should add an apostrophe to the end. Look at the example below.

U2 was named the Greatest Act of the Last 25 Years in a *Q Magazine* readers' poll.

Sneak Peek

Answer: A.

This question is testing comma rules, specifically unnecessary information. The *personal conflict* is an unnecessary idea and therefore needs to be set apart from the rest of the sentence with commas.

The *readers* possess the *poll*. Since there is more than one reader, the noun is plural. Therefore, to show possession only an apostrophe is added. Some irregular plural nouns, however, do not end in "s". For example, the noun "children" is plural. In order to show possession with these words, an apostrophe followed by an "s" is used. Look at the example below:

The Chernobyl Children's Project received all of the profits from the single "Sweetest Thing."

Apostrophes

Contractions: when attached to a pronoun, expand it out.

Possession: When attached to a singular noun, add an "s."

When attached to a plural noun that ends in "s," add an apostrophe.

When attached to a plural noun that does *not* end in /s/, add an 's.

Sneak Peek

U2's music often has social and political commentary, as well as personal conflict, that is sometimes criticized.

11. A. NO CHANGE
B. commentary, as well as personal conflict
C. commentary as well as personal conflict,
D. commentary as well as personal conflict