

# Why English punctuation is so important

Before Punctuation:

A woman  
without her man  
is nothing.

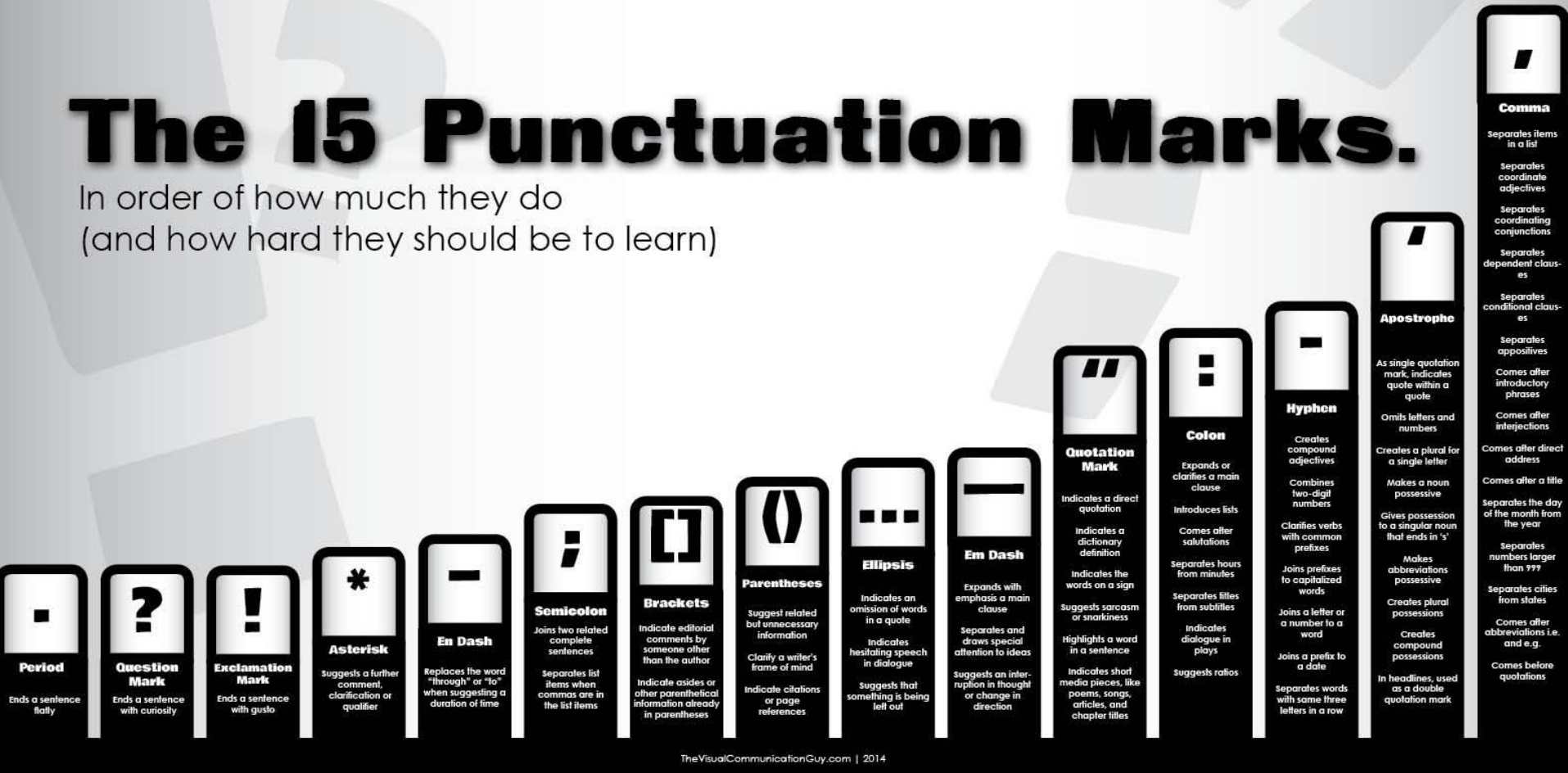
After Punctuation:

A woman:  
without her,  
man is nothing.

# What are the 15 punctuation marks?

## The 15 Punctuation Marks.

In order of how much they do  
(and how hard they should be to learn)



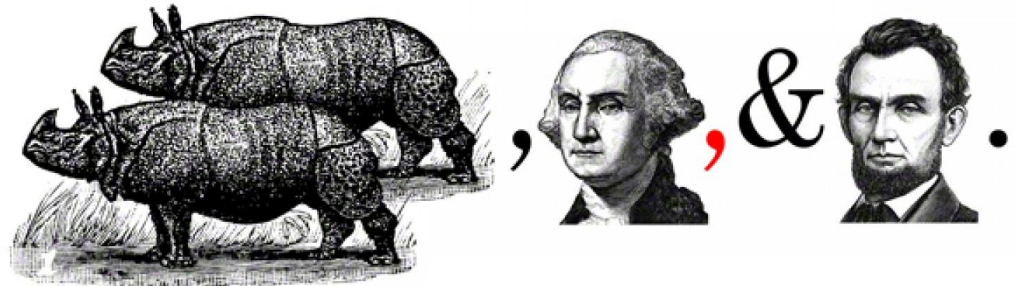
# Let's get it out of the way first:

## The Oxford Comma

A serial comma (also called Oxford comma) is a comma placed before the coordinating conjunction (usually and, or, or nor) in a series of three or more terms to separate items on a list.

With the **Oxford Comma**:

We invited the rhinoceri, Washington, and Lincoln.



Without the Oxford Comma:

We invited the rhinoceri, Washington and Lincoln.



With the Oxford comma:  
we invited the strippers, jfk, and stalin.



Without the Oxford comma:  
we invited the strippers, jfk and stalin.



# Examples!

# How else can we use a comma?

- To separate phrases, words or clauses (sentences) in **lists**.
- A list of **adjectives** usually requires commas. However, if an adjective is **modifying** another adjective you do not separate them with a comma

Anya is fun, bright, beautiful, and intelligent.

**BUT** Anya has a bright red dress.

# Enclosing details

- Use a comma to enclose non-defining relative clauses and other non-essential details and comments. The comma is placed **on either side** of the insertion.

Finals, one of the most exhausting weeks of my life, are finally over.

Cats, unlike dogs, are useless.

My friend, Anya, is groovy.



# Other

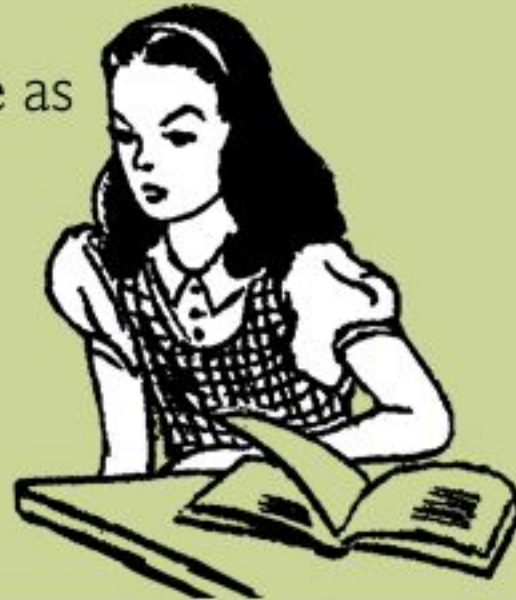
- Tag questions

She does not attend classes often, does she?

- Interjections

Yes, I will stay in bed a little longer, thank you.

I've rejected using the Oxford comma ever since Oxford rejected me as an undergrad.



# More complex matters

## Separation of clauses

- After **subordinate clauses** at the start of sentences.

When the bell rang, we all left the classroom  
(**BUT** we all left the classroom when the bell rang)

- To separate **dependant clauses** from **independent clauses** if the dependent clause comes first

After I fed the cat, I brushed my clothes.  
(**BUT** I brushed my clothes after I fed the cat.)



## ... and even more clauses

- Separating of **two independent clauses** with subjects joined by a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) before the conjunction

Mary walked to the party, but she was unable to walk home.

(**BUT** Mary walked to the party but was unable to walk home.)

# Adverbs + Comma

- Commas are always used to set off certain adverbs at the beginning of a sentence, including **however, in fact, therefore, nevertheless, moreover, furthermore, hopefully** and **still**.

**Therefore**, a comma would be appropriate in this sentence.

**In fact**, I will use one right now.

- If these adverbs appear in the middle of a sentence, they are followed and preceded by a comma
- Using commas to offset certain adverbs is optional, including **then, so, yet, instead**, and **too** (meaning also).

# Introductory phrases + comma

Once upon a time ....

There should be  
a comma...

# Quotation mark + comma

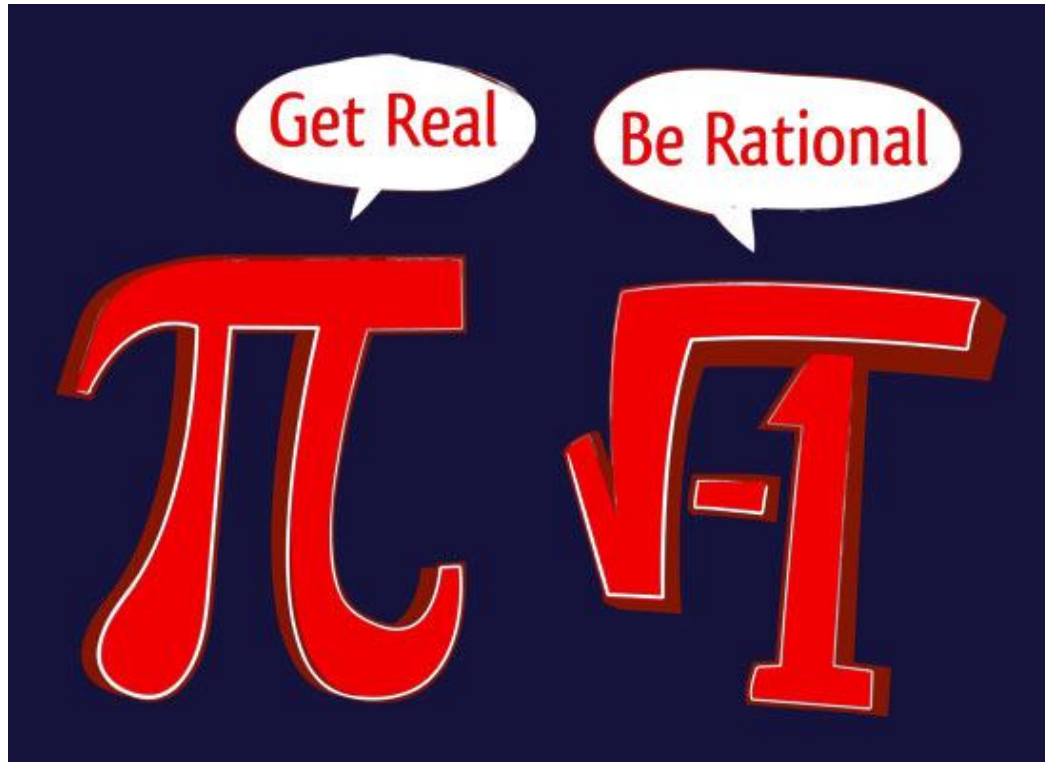
- In American English, the comma is commonly included **inside** a quotation mark:

My mother gave me the nickname "Bobby Bobby Bob Bob Boy," which really made me angry.

- However, in British English, punctuation is placed **within** quotation marks only if it is part of what is being quoted or referred to:

My mother gave me the nickname "Bobby Bobby Bob Bob Boy", which really made me angry.

We DON'T use commas in decimal numbers, we use dots  
(4.7 not 4,7)



# Colon is used when

- The colon **expands** on the sentence that precedes it, often introducing a **list** that demonstrates or **elaborates** whatever was previously stated.

Olga procrastinates by watching tv shows:  
Doctor Who, How to get away with murder,  
Community, etc.

# How to use a semicolon

The most feared punctuation on earth

Created by The Oatmeal

<http://theoatmeal.com>



“ Using a semicolon isn't hard; I once saw a party gorilla do it. ”



# Why

## What's the point of a semicolon?

The most common way to use a semicolon is to connect two independent clauses. For example:

*“ The ice cream truck man drove by my house today. He had big hairy knuckles. ”*

The two statements are separated by a period. If read aloud, it would go something like this:

*“ The ice cream truck man drove by my house today. \*take a breath\* He had big hairy knuckles. ”*

With a semicolon, however, it would sound like this:

*“ The ice cream truck man drove by my house today; he had big hairy knuckles. ”*

Basically what we did was eliminate the pause between the two statements without using words such as *and*, *but*, *nor*, or *yet*.



# How

## How do I use a semicolon?

If you have two independent clauses, meaning they could stand alone as their own sentences, it's ok to use a semicolon. For example:



*“ My aunt also had hairy knuckles; she loved to wash and comb them. ”*

This is an independent clause, meaning it could stand alone as a complete sentence.

This is also an independent clause; it could exist without being attached to its predecessor.

# Don't

## Don't use it with conjunctions.

Conjunctions are words like *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*.

“ My aunt's hairy knuckles are magnificent indeed, but I have no desire to stroke them. ”

A comma is used because there's a *but* separating the two clauses.



# When

## When should I use a semicolon?

*“ I gnaw on old car tires; it strengthens my jaw so I’ll be better conditioned for bear combat. ”*

Use a semicolon when you want to form a bond between two statements, typically when they are related to or contrast with one another.

In the example above, the relationship between gnawing on tires and combatting bears is strengthened by using a semicolon.



*“ I fought the bear and won. Also, I never kiss plague rats on the mouth. ”*

Here is OK to kiss



NEVER kiss here

In this sentence, your victory against the bear does not need to be connected to the plague rat, so a period is used.

# Pause

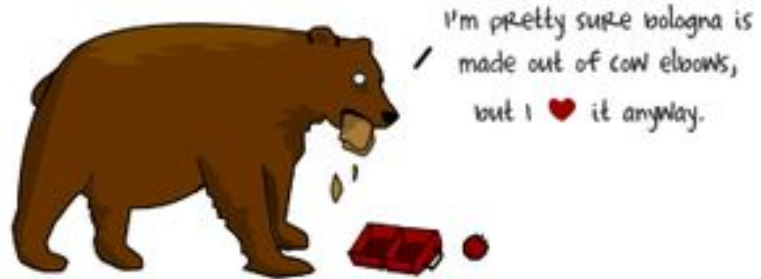


Both bears and semicolons have pause.

Comma  
(brief pause)



Semicolon  
(moderate pause)



Period  
(complete stop)

zzz...zzz...z





# Super

Use a semicolon as a super-comma.

*“ While searching for a good place to get a unicorn burger, I traveled to Seattle, Washington; Tokyo, Japan; and London, England. ”*

Use a semicolon if you need to make a list of items that are separated with a comma. This often occurs when listing locations, names, dates, and descriptions.



The most enchanting meat on earth comes from the thighs of a unicorn.

Mayonnaise made me the man I am today!



*“ My favorite people include Samuel Slaughterjaws, a famous unicorn hunter; my uncle Wilford, a world champion at mayonnaise eating contests; and Nikola Tesla, the most awesome dude to ever fire a lightning bolt at an angry peasant. ”*

The semicolon enables you to list and describe all three characters in the same sentence.

# Internal

Use a semicolon to connect sentences that contain internal punctuation.



*“ When dinosaurs agree on something, they’ll often high five one another; dinosaurs are all about high fives. ”*

If you’d used a comma in this sentence it would have resulted in a comma splice. If you’d used a period you’d lose the connection between the two clauses.



# The End



*“Godzilla is a misunderstood creature; beneath his raging desire to set people on fire and eat them lies a gentle giant who just wants to cuddle.”*