

## PUNCTUATION AND SYNTAX

This document provides a system of punctuation that is based on the syntax of English sentences. It accords with the practice of leading publishers, and it conforms to the recommendations of such publications as *The New York Public Library Writer's Guide to Style and Usage*. Skillful writers often punctuate in ways that violate this system of punctuation, but they have earned the right to do so: they know what they are doing and why. If you master the system presented in this document, you will not make errors of punctuation that teachers and editors will want to correct. You will also have the ability to justify your occasional departures from the rules: you will understand why your usage is preferable in the circumstances.

Marks of punctuation such as commas and semicolons are now used to clarify the grammatical structure of a sentence; they are not used (as they once were) to indicate when and for how long a person uttering the sentence should pause. At the present time, the position of these marks in a well-constructed sentence is analogous to the position of parentheses and brackets in a properly punctuated mathematical formula. It has little to do with the way the sentence is uttered or pronounced.

People rarely have trouble with some of the contexts in which an elementary mark of punctuation is considered correct. Everyone knows that a comma should follow *sincerely* at the end of a letter, and almost everyone knows that in the American system of representing dates by month, day, and year, a comma should follow the numeral indicating the day--as in *June 5, 1995*. But in the context of compound and complex sentences, even college seniors have trouble with commas, and many graduate students (even some professors) cannot cope with dashes and semicolons. The difficulty is apparently owing to their lack of familiarity with elementary grammatical distinctions such as that between clauses and phrases, appositives and participles. These notes clarify such distinctions and show how the accepted use of commas, semicolons, dashes, colons, and parentheses is related to the syntactical structure of the sentences containing them. Initially, rules will be given for the proper use of each punctuation mark, but near the end of the document (p. 23) a short checklist will supplant most of the rules and relate commas and semicolons to a small group of grammatical structures that assume different forms in different sentences.

## COMMAS AND SEMICOLONS

### Clauses

A basic use of commas and semicolons is to separate clauses from other elements in sentences. To understand how this is done, one must understand what a clause is and how different kinds of clauses are identified. It is helpful to begin with a basic definition: **A clause is a string of words having both a subject and an attached predicate**--that is, a predicate that **applies** or is **attached** to the subject. A **subject** is a word or group of words that is used to **denote or identify** the thing or group of things that the clause is about. Examples are *Alison, the President of the United States, a man with a vacant expression and a sad smile, all the king's men, and a day in May*. Subjects so understood are sometimes called "noun phrases." A **predicate** is a word or group of words that is used to **describe or classify** the thing or things identified by a subject. Predicates always contain a verb (a word like *is* or *laughs*), so they are sometimes called "verb

phrases.” Examples of predicates are *smiles* (as in *Alison smiles*), *is wise* (as in *Tom is wise*), *sat on a horse and smiled*, and *looked at his face in the mirror*.

There are two basic kinds of clauses, independent and dependent ones. **Independent clauses** can stand by themselves as proper sentences; **dependent clauses** cannot. The dependence of the latter on another clause or phrase is indicated by the presence in them of **relative pronouns** (such as *who*, *which*, or *that*), **subordinating conjunctions** (such as *since*, *when*, *although*, and *if*), or a *that* introduced by a verb such as *says* or *thinks*. The following are examples of dependent clauses. Note that, in spite of containing a word that ties them to another clause or phrase, each clause contains both a subject and a predicate:

who was a gardener  
if I were your age  
when I was a student  
although he did not speak French  
that Mary is wise (*that* preceded by *Tom said*).

If the words *when*, *although*, and *that* are deleted from the last three examples, independent clauses are created:

I was a student  
he did not speak French.  
Mary is wise.

The result of deleting *if* from *if I were your age* is not an independent clause because *I were your age* cannot stand by itself as a sentence. It does not have the right kind of verb. The sort of verb a simple sentence must contain is both **finite** and **nonsubjunctive**. A finite verb is in the first, second, or third person; it is singular or plural; and it is in the present, past, or some other tense. (Thus, infinitives--e.g. *to run*--and participles--e.g. *running*--are not finite verbs.) A verb is nonsubjunctive when it is **not in the subjunctive mood**. It is difficult to characterize the subjunctive mood in just a few words. Suffice it to say that the thoughts conveyed by clauses containing verbs in the subjunctive mood are always tied to (and thus not independent of) some other clause--as *if I were your age* and *if I had known her name* are tied, respectively, to clauses such as *I would be a college student* and *I would not have asked for it*. Since a clause containing a subjunctive verb is always part of a compound sentence, it cannot be an independent clause.

To avoid mistaking certain independent clauses for dependent ones, it is important to distinguish **subordinating conjunctions**, which generate dependent clauses, from **coordinating conjunctions**, which merely link clauses or phrases to others. A coordinating conjunction is a word such as *and*, *but*, *yet*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *because*, and *so*. Unlike subordinating conjunctions, coordinating conjunctions **do not become part** of the clauses they connect. Thus, in the sentence *Tom was intelligent, but he was also very stubborn* both clauses are independent because *but* merely connects (or “coordinates”) *Tom was intelligent* and *he was also very stubborn*, both of which could stand by themselves as proper sentences. The same is not true of *Tom was exceptionally intelligent even though he was very stubborn*. The words *even though* function as a subordinating conjunction, and in this sentence about Tom they are part of the dependent clause *even though he was very stubborn*.

**Exercise 1: Identify the clauses in the following sentences and determine whether they are dependent or independent. Ignore the punctuation; it is often defective. Note that a sentence can begin with a word like nevertheless.**

- h1. They were very tired and they still had miles to ride.
  2. The plan had certain weaknesses nevertheless we decided to adopt it.
  3. The water and the food supplies were running very low.
  4. She was very pretty but rather hard to get along with.
  5. Mary's father had always been active in politics yet he remained a simple vice-principal all his life.
  6. We decided to fish Robert out of the river for we loved him very much despite his faults.
  7. The new city administration had been in office for six months yet not one of the promised reforms had been put in effect.
  8. None of the teachers knew what had happened nor could the students offer any explanation.
  9. Motorists who fail to renew their licenses or who drive when their licenses have been suspended will be subject to severe penalties.
  10. He always intended to return to Sioux Falls where he had spent his boyhood.
  11. We suggested that he try soaking it in grape juice an idea which had not occurred to him.
  12. We enjoyed watching the children playing with their teddy bears.
  13. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.
- af014. We entrusted the toasting of the marshmallows to Alice who had been a Campfire Girl.
15. Climbing out of the spaceship the men found themselves in a meadow through which ran a little brook.
  16. When he finally summoned the courage to knock no one answered the door.
  17. His mother had been an actress so he knew the theater very well.
  18. Just to get a loaf of bread or a bottle of milk he had to walk fifteen miles.
  19. Since he carried no insurance nothing could be done about it.
  20. If Darleen's death was a paid hit carried out by a professional or the work of a psychopathic federal agent who had neglected her in advance because she was Harry's daughter, then did this individual not know that Darleen was an Olympic-caliber gymnast?

### **Joining Independent Clauses**

Clauses, both independent and dependent, may be joined together in compound sentences. Such sentences require punctuation by commas or semicolons. **The basic rule for joining independent clauses to one another is this:**

**R1:** If C1 and C2 are independent clauses, they may be joined together in just two ways: either (1) by using a semicolon according to the pattern of **C1; C2** or (2) by using a **coordinating conjunction** (such as *and, but, yet, or, nor, for, because, so*) together with a comma according to the pattern, **C1, c-conj C2**.

t

Here are some examples of sentences conforming to the rule **R1**:

The new city administration has been in office for six months, but not one of the promised reforms has been put in effect.

We had no idea who the redheaded man was; none of us had seen him before.

The Turkish bath is a dying institution; it now rarely found in American cities.

The man could not produce a ticket, so he was asked to leave.

There are two **permissible exceptions** to rule **R1**:

**EXC1:** If the independent clauses are very short, they may be joined together with a comma rather than a semicolon or with a coordinating conjunction not preceded by a comma.

**EXC2:** If an independent clause containing internal punctuation is joined to another independent clause by a coordinating conjunction, it may be advisable to separate the two clauses with a semicolon rather than a mere comma.

The following sentences illustrate the exceptions, **EXC1** and **EXC2**:

I ran and she walked.

It is not a good idea to miss a class; yet if you have to miss one, you should make an effort to see a classmate's notes.

An observation pertinent to **EXC2** is that, when three or more clauses are joined together by conjunctions, one of the conjunctions often marks a stronger separation between conjuncts than the others. When this happens, a semicolon should be used before the **dominant conjunction**. The need for this is evident from the difference between

*I went home; but the house was empty, and the lights were turned off*  
and  
*I went home, but the house was empty; I have never felt more alone.*

**Exercise 2:** Determine whether the following sentences conform to **R1**, **EXC1**, or **EXC2**. (In some of these sentences an independent clause is begun with a conjunctive adverb such as *however* or *nevertheless*.)

They were very tired and they still had miles to ride.

The plan had certain weaknesses nevertheless we decided to adopt it

The water and the food supplies were running low.

The spaghetti itself was good but the sauce was rancid.

There seemed no chance of coming to an agreement therefore it was decided to break off negotiations.

Angela had lived all her life in Boston however she didn't really know the city.

We simply told him that he had to shape up or ship out.

Sue's father had always been active in politics indeed he had once run for governor.

He was a man of great energy yet he remained a simple school teacher all his life.

The table had not been cleared moreover the sink was full of dishes.

We decided to fish Herbert out of the river for we loved him very despite his faults.

He was a most entertaining conversationalist but not a very good writer.

The village was beautiful when winter came and the snow began to fall.

Each attack left him weaker than the one before thus he crept softly into the arms of death.

The new city administration has been six months in office yet not one of the promised reforms has been put into effect.

His mother was the daughter of a New England minister and his father had been a missionary in China.

The floods had damaged many of the railroad bridges consequently all trains were running late.

She had never been out of Ireland in fact she had never been more than twenty miles from Dublin.

We couldn't find any firewood so we simply chopped up some of the furniture.

You will have to report this immediately or you will be in serious trouble with the police.

22.

The coach was not on speaking terms with any of the players hence team morale was rather low.

They knew perfectly well that dropping smoke bombs in the cafeteria was against the rules and that they could be suspended for it.

Clarence's new automobile had no motor but it was in very fine condition in other respects.

The rebels didn't have enough men to make a stand anywhere furthermore they were running short of ammunition.

None of the teachers knew what had happened nor could the students offer any explanation.

Uncle Horace was by then fully recovered from the ague accordingly the family set forth once more for Winnipeg.

Stanley didn't know the first thing about putting a high-pressure boiler on the line nevertheless he decided to try it.

Motorists who fail to renew their licenses or who drive when their licenses have been suspended will be subject to severe penalties.

Spring had come once again to Amherst and the squirrels were again running about on the town common.

### Using Conjunctive adverbs to join independent clauses

Another way of joining independent clauses is by using **conjunctive adverbs** such as *however, consequently, thus, hence, nevertheless, moreover, accordingly, indeed, in fact, and otherwise*. In connecting independent clauses, a conjunctive adverb actually does two jobs: it connects the clauses, thus serving as a conjunction; and it also modifies one of the clauses, thus serving as an adverbial clause modifier. Because conjunctive adverbs in compound sentences do two jobs, the sentences in which they occur require two kinds of punctuation. The appropriate punctuation is explained by the *rule for joining clauses by conjunctive adverbs*:

**R2:** When independent clauses are joined by a conjunctive adverb, the resulting compound should be punctuated this way: (a) the independent clauses should be separated by a semicolon; (b) the conjunctive adverb should be attached to one of the clauses rather than the other; and (c) the conjunctive adverb should be set off from the clause to which it is attached by a comma.

The following examples illustrate the rule **R2**:

The table had not been cleared; moreover, the sink was full of dirty dishes.

xt2. Sue's father had not always been active in politics, however; once he was a full-time professor of English. (Note that the *however* goes with the first clause here.)

The floods had damaged many of the railway bridges; consequently, all trains were running late.

Although conjunctive adverbs are commonly used to connect independent clauses, they can also occur in sentences that are not compound, and they need not occur at the beginning of such a sentence. Here are some examples:

955

I wouldn't try that, however.

At last, however, the train came into view.

3. 7Consequently, he left the room.

The clause modifiers in the last three sentences are still conjunctive; but instead of connecting one clause to another, they allude to some other remark or clause that is understood or given earlier. The *however* in sentences (1) and (2) is used to contrast what is said in those sentences with something said earlier; and the *consequently* in sentence (3) represents the action described by *He left the room* as the consequence of something already related or described. Apart from this allusion to something said earlier, the conjunctive adverbs behave like typical *clause adverbs* (often called *sentence adverbs*): they modify or qualify in some way the idea conveyed by the clause to which they are attached. The following sentences contain clause adverbs that are not conjunctive:

Obviously, he enjoyed being ill.

The speaker was seriously biased, of course.

The answer, probably, was carefully considered.

**Exercise 3:** Identify the conjunctive adverbs in Exercise 2, and punctuate the sentences containing them in accordance with rule R2.

tx3955

**Exercise 4:** Using the following conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs, compose and properly punctuate two sentences featuring each of them:

*and, therefore, but, moreover, or, indeed, furthermore, yet, however, for, in fact, consequently, thus, so, nevertheless, so, hence, nevertheless.*

### Joining Dependent Clauses to Independent Clauses

Dependent clauses are joined to independent clauses by relative pronouns (such as *who*, *which*, or *that*) or subordinating conjunctions (such as *since*, *when*, *although*, and *if*). The basic rule for punctuating sentences in which dependent clauses are joined to independent clauses is this:

**R3:** If the dependent clause is attached to the beginning or the end of the independent clause, the two clauses should be separated by a comma. If the dependent clause is placed within the independent clause, the dependent clause should be set off by commas **unless** it is attached to a noun (or noun phrase) as a restrictive modifier. (The exception mentioned after **unless** will be explained shortly.)

Here are some examples illustrating the rule **R3**:

My old friend Tom, who is a devoted fisherman, lives in Key West, Florida.  
His office is in the Psychology building, which is attached to Bartlett Hall.  
Since Latin and Greek are very difficult languages, it is best to start learning them in high school.  
Billy is a college senior, although he is only sixteen.

ls34He will start practicing law next year, if he passes the bar exams.

Note that the independent clause in sentence #1 is split into two parts, *My old friend Tom* and *lives in Key West, Florida*. The dependent clause inserted into it is a modifier attached to the noun *Tom*. Sentence #2 also contains a dependent clause modifying a noun; in this case the noun (it is actually a noun-phrase) is *the Psychology building*. By contrast with these first two sentences, the other three contain dependent clauses that are considered clause modifiers: their dependent clauses modify (they qualify the ideas conveyed by) their main clauses. In spite of these differences between the first two and the last three sentences here, all five are regarded as examples of **complex sentences**. Such sentences are contrasted with those resulting from joining independent clauses. If two or more independent clauses are joined together in ways described earlier (that is, by semicolons, conjunctions and commas, or conjunctive adverbs and their appropriate punctuation), the result is a **compound sentence**. If a compound sentence contains a complex sentence as a part, it is said to be a **complex-compound sentence**.

The restrictive modifiers pertinent to the exception mentioned rule **R3** are **restrictive relative clauses**. Such clauses combine with the nouns they modify to form a phrase that identifies an object, or certain objects, of reference; they do not merely provide information about an object, or certain objects, otherwise identified. Consider the sentence, *The man who is wearing the gray suit is my uncle*. Here the clause *who is wearing the gray suit* combines with *the man* to form a phrase that is intended to pick out, or identify, a certain man--the one wearing the gray suit. If this clause were omitted from the sentence, the resulting subject, *the man*, might have an

indeterminate reference. If we heard someone utter the sentence with the relative clause omitted, we might want to ask "What man is your uncle?" or "What man are you talking about?"

In sentences containing restrictive relative clauses, the relative pronouns are frequently omitted. The relative clauses must then be identified by their positions in the sentence, not by the relative pronoun occurring in them. Here are some examples:

*The man you can see in the corner is my uncle.* (Here *whom* or *that* is omitted from the relative clause modifying *The man.*)

*The flower he gave her was a tulip.* (Here *that* is omitted from the relative clause modifying *The flower.*)

As these examples illustrate, **restrictive relative clauses are not set off by commas**. They are, in effect, fused to the clauses they modify, and, as such, they yield complex noun phrases that do not require internal punctuation.

**Nonrestrictive relative clauses**, the sort that should be set off by commas, are not used to identify a subject; they are used to provide information about a subject that is adequately identified (at least in the speaker's opinion) by other words. A clause of this kind occurs in the sentence, *The man in the gray suit, who is my uncle, is talking to a senator.* The relative clause here is not used to identify the person spoken of; it can be removed from the sentence without raising questions about the identity of the person the speaker has in mind. Because nonrestrictive relative clauses merely supply information about subjects otherwise identified in a sentence, they are essentially parenthetical additions to a sentence and should be set off by commas.

When *that* or *which* (as opposed, say, to *who*) is appropriate in a relative clause, it is customary to use *that* for a **restrictive** clause and *which* for a **nonrestrictive** one. Of course, if a relative clause is restrictive, it is apt to be used without the *that*. The pronoun *who*, by contrast, may introduce either kind of clause. The same is true of *when* and *where*. *When* is used for a restrictive relative clause in *The time when exams are given is 4:30 p.m.*, and *where* has this use in *The place where I was born is far from here.*

Although the distinction between *that* and *which* in relative clauses is customary (and even insisted upon by many editors), it is not always observed by literate writers. Consequently, to decide whether a given relative pronoun is being used to introduce a restrictive, or nonrestrictive, relative clause, you should always ask yourself whether the clause it introduces is needed to identify some object of reference, or whether it is essentially parenthetical. You cannot, in practice, decide such a matter merely by considering which relative pronoun introduces a phrase.

8 **Exercise 5: Identify the subordinate clauses in the following sentences, and indicate which words are subordinating conjunctions:**

Although he was only thirty-two, he was a full professor at the university.

2. John returned home promptly after he was discharged from the army.

Since I ordered the meal, I had an obligation to pay for it.

Whenever I feel like exercising, I lie down until the feeling goes away.

Anyone who knows me knows that I would never lie about a matter like this.

Wherever you look you can see unhappy people.

Given that the problem has no solution, you ought to forget about it.

I wouldn't work for a man who treats his employees like that.

9. 1977Nero fiddled while Rome burned.

You may scold a carpenter who has made you a bad table, though you cannot make a table.

**Exercise 6: Identify the relative clauses in the following sentences. Indicate whether the clauses are restrictive or nonrestrictive, and determine whether the sentences containing them are properly punctuated.**

John who knew eastern Idaho very well shook his head.

Every soldier who needed spiritual advice was sent to the chaplain

The part that had been torn out was most important.

His left arm which had been injured during the war still gave him some pain.

He always intended to return to Sioux Falls where he had spent his boyhood.

Her physician who was supposed to be an eminent specialist told her that she had nothing to worry about.

People who live in stone houses shouldn't throw glass cups.

We entrusted the toasting of the marshmallows to Alice who had been a Campfire Girl.

I didn't own a watch which would keep good time.

Climbing out of the spaceship the men found themselves in a meadow through which ran a little brook.

If D's death was a paid hit carried out by a professional or the work of a psychopathic federal agent who had neglected her in advance because she was H's daughter, then did this individual not know that D was an Olympic-caliber gymnast? (Patricia Cornwell)

The Gertrude that I mean is a waitress at the Argonaut.

Gertrude whom I intend to marry is a waitress at the Argonaut. r Those who have seen it like it very much.

Arnold who had never met Angela gasped in surprised.

All students who fail will be given another chance.

Murchison who had heard many stories began to yawn.

My room which faced the inner courtyard was very quiet.

He lived in the historic old Darlington house which has since burned down.

The rooms that faced the street are very noisy.

### **Conjunctions as clause modifiers.**

At various places in the preceding discussion conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, and clause modifiers have been introduced. Conjunctions may be coordinating (like **and**, **yet**, and **nor**) or subordinating (like **although**, **since**, and **if**) and both may be used to join clauses together.

Conjunctive adverbs such as **however**, **moreover**, and **consequently** may also be used to join clauses, but they can equally appear in single clauses as adverbial clause modifiers.

**Nevertheless**, **it was a bad idea** and **I had reservations**, **however** are both acceptable sentences even though **nevertheless** and **however** are conjunctive adverbs. In these sentences the conjunctive adverbs are referred in some way to other sentences (they are somehow connected to them in thought), but they are not physically or explicitly connected to them. In this respect conjunctive adverbs differ significantly from clause adverbs such as **probably** or **certainly**, which are not necessarily connected to other sentences in any way at all.

Although **and**, **but**, **yet**, and **for** are paradigm examples of coordinating conjunctions, **and**, **but**, and **yet** (and occasionally **for**, though this is usually frowned upon in American writing) are also used as clause modifiers, in which case they function as conjunctive adverbs. Here are some examples:

But that was a mistake.  
And I knew what she meant.  
Yet the problem remains.

4449Students are often told that it is a mistake to begin sentences with **and** or **but**, but the advice is now outmoded. Modern English favors shorter sentences; and where **and**, **but**, and **yet** used to be connected to previous clauses by semicolons, they are now often separated from those clauses by periods. There is nothing deplorable in this development. For most people, shorter sentences are



easier to understand than long ones, and a sentence begun with *but* is more natural and less bookish than one begun with *however* and more direct and less long-winded than one begun with *nevertheless*. Parallel observations hold for *yet* and *and*. *Yet* is a more “adversative” conjunction than *but*, and *and* often differs little in meaning from *also*, *in addition*, or *moreover*, which commonly function as conjunctive adverbs. The three sentences cited above are, in fact, stylistic variants of the following:

Nevertheless, that was a mistake.  
Moreover, I knew what she meant.  
Still, the problem remains.

In view of the similarity of these pairs of sentences, it is clear that *and*, *but*, *yet* and other conjunctions often play the role of conjunctive adverbs, although they are not set off by commas as conjunctive adverbs normally are. This dual role of conjunctions is not peculiar to modern language; it is equally common in ancient Greek.

tx1977            Clause modifiers may be single words such as *however* or *probably*; they may be phrases such as *in the first place* or *by learning French*; and they may take the form of dependent clauses as in *Although she is only thirteen, she is adept at advanced mathematics*. The general rule for punctuating such modifiers is this:

**R4: A clause modifier (whether word, phrase, or clause) should be separated from the clause it modifies either by one comma, if it occurs at the beginning or the end of the clause, or by two commas, if it occurs somewhere within the clause.**

**Clauses as predicate modifiers.** A common error of punctuation results from confusing clauses that modify predicates with clauses that modify clauses. In the sentence *When she got home, I told Mary to call*, the dependent clause *when she got home* functions as an adverbial clause modifier and should be separated from the main clause by a comma. But in the superficially similar sentence *I told Mary to call when she gets home*, the dependent clause is part of a predicate modifier attached to the infinitive phrase *Mary to call*. The infinitive phrase together with the dependent clause, *Mary to call when she gets home*, forms the object of the verb *told*, and this propositional object is a unit, an adverbial modifier, that should not be split apart by a comma. A similar confusion is apt to occur with *because* clauses. In a sentence such as *He is doing it because he wants to*, the words *because he wants to* do not function as a subordinate clause that should be set off by a comma; they serve, rather (at least on a natural reading), as a predicate modifier equivalent in meaning to the prepositional phrase *for the reason that he wants to*.

**Exercise 7: Identify the clause modifiers in the following sentences and indicate whether those sentences are properly punctuated:**

Outside the house needed a coat of paint.  
By pushing a button on his desk he was able to release the latch on the door.  
The reason for his sudden disappearance has never been satisfactorily explained.  
ecSince neither of us had a watch we had not the slightest notion of what time it was.  
To emphasize my point I jabbed him vigorously in the chest..  
Knowing that he would never get another chance he climbed aboard.

A hard fellow to best in an argument Johanson usually had his own way.  
 To know India is not to know Asia.  
 To the great surprise of everyone who was present Frank turned out to have a beautiful tenor voice.  
 Unquestionably he should have been dismissed long ago.  
 Confronted with the evidence he made a full confession.  
 Though he was not exactly truthful Clarence seldom told a down-right lie.  
 Flattering him about his beautiful eyebrows won't get you anywhere.  
 The day being a beautiful one we decided to drive to Lyon.  
 Driving through the city we stopped to picnic on the banks of the river.  
 If we had only remembered to bring some food the picnic might have been a great success.  
 Aware that his client did not have a very good case Mr. Smith decided to bribe the jury.  
 The fact that bribing jurors is against the law simply did not occur to him.  
 If you need anything just press the button beside your bed.  
 True to his principles Blackwell flatly refused to take part.  
 Surprisingly enough no plans had been drawn up at all.  
 Not wanting to anger him we pretended to agree.  
 Because food was his only real interest he settled down in Paris.  
 In the interests of those who had been unable to attend it was decided to postpone the vote.

**Exercise 8: Identify the subordinate clauses in the following sentences, determine whether those clauses are clause modifiers or predicate modifiers, and introduce the appropriate punctuation:**

The village is beautiful when fall arrives the leaves turn to red and gold.  
 When I was a child I thought as a child but when I became a man I put away childish things.  
 She smiles whenever she thinks of her youngest son.  
 If D's death was a paid hit carried out by a professional or the work of a psychopathic federal agent who had neglected her in advance because she was H's daughter then did this individual not know that D was an Olympic-caliber gymnast? (Patricia Cornwell)  
 Everybody busy patting himself on the back because the Reds went into the dumpster is going to be wondering who won then when Coca-Cola applies for a seat in the UN. (Scott Turow)  
 I told my daughter to give us a call when she arrives in Chicago.  
 When she arrived in Chicago her husband reminded her to give her mother a call.  
 I wanted to honor her memory because I owed her so much.  
 Because I owed her so much I wanted to honor her memory.  
 Insulting a person because he or she has insulted you is not an admirable thing to do.

## PHRASES

I have emphasized that writers who punctuate correctly are able to distinguish clauses from phrases. I have now discussed clauses and explained what punctuation is required when clauses are connected together in larger sentences. My next task is to deal with phrases and to explain when punctuation is required by the presence of various phrases in well-composed sentences.

**Definition:** A phrase is a string of words that functions as a unit but lacks the subject-predicate structure of a clause. The following are examples of phrases:

Simple noun phrases: *the father of the bride, some wild animals, John's sister.*

Simple verb phrases: *ran quickly, ate strawberries, thought about Plato.*

Prepositional phrases: *in the beginning, on the mat, to the store, like a bulldog.*

Participial phrase: *relaxed by brandy* in the context of *Relaxed by brandy, we tottered off to bed.*

Adverbial phrase: *because of illness* in *She left because of illness.*

The phrases just given have a simple structure that does not require punctuation (except for the apostrophe in *John's sister*). Yet each phrase can be enlarged with different words, combined with other phrases of different sorts, and inserted into sentences in a variety of ways--with the result that special punctuation is called for.

### Using Conjunctions to Join Phrases

When conjunctions are used to join *clauses*, commas or even semicolons are required. But conjunctions can also be used to join phrases and even single words, and in these cases commas are rarely acceptable. Here are some simple examples:

Noun phrase joined to noun phrase: *the worst of times and the best of times; Mary's dad or Bill's uncle; the father of the bride but the enemy of the groom.*

Verbs phrase joined to verb phrase: *went to the store and bought some bread; milked the cow or fed the cat or killed the rat or ate the cheese.*

Prepositional phrases joined to prepositional phrases: *over the river and through the woods; in the morning or in the evening.*

Participial phrase to participial phrase: *relaxed by brandy but bored by television; eager to please but inept at performing.*

Adverbial phrase to adverbial phrase: *because of illness and in spite of need.*

Adjective to adjective: *sadder but wiser; wiser if sadder; charming though silly.*

The rule suggested by these cases and commonly violated by undergraduates is this:

**R5: If a conjunction does not connect clauses, it should not be accompanied by a comma.**

**Exercise 9: Identify the conjunctions in the following sentences and indicate whether they connect phrases or clauses:**

The water and the food supplies were running low.

She was very pretty but rather hard to get along with.

The spaghetti itself was good but the sauce was rancid.

There seemed no chance of coming to an agreement, so we decided to break off negotiations.

Angela had lived in Boston all her life but didn't really know the city.

We simply told him that he had to shape up or ship out.

Sue's father had always been active in politics and had once run for governor.

He was a man of great ambition but he nevertheless spent a lot of time playing golf.

We decided to fish Herbert out of the river because we loved him in spite of his faults.

The village was beautiful when winter came and the snow began to fall.

Each attack left him weaker than the one before, and it was evident that he would not live much longer.

The new city administration has been six months in office, yet not one of the promised reforms has been put into effect.

His mother was the daughter of a New England minister, and his father had been a missionary in China.

The trains were running late because many of the railroad bridges had been damaged.

You will have to report this immediately or you will be in serious trouble with the police.

### Some Modifying Phrases: participles, absolutes, and appositives

Phrases often appear in sentences as **modifiers** of words, clauses, or other phrases. A **participial phrase** is an extremely important modifier of this kind. Participial phrases consist of the present or past participle of a verb followed, usually, by an adverb, a prepositional phrase,

a noun phrase. A **simple participial phrase** is a single verb participle (such as *sitting* or *tired*) that is attached adjectivally to a noun. In the sentence *Tired, Tom soon fell asleep* the word *tired* functions this way; it directly modifies *Tom*, which is the subject of the clause to which it is attached. **Complex participial phrases** contain a participle followed by modifiers; examples are *sung slowly* (participle + adverb), *sitting on the porch* (participle + prepositional phrase), and *loving Mary's sister* (participle + noun phrase). These participial phrases play an adjectival role in sentences such as the following:

*Sung slowly, the song is very moving.*  
*Sitting on the porch, I had a clear view of the park.*  
*Loving Mary's sister, Bill was a frequent visitor.*  
*I ignored his error, not wishing to embarrass him.*

As in the case of clause modifiers with which they are sometimes classified, participial phrases may occur either at the beginning or the end of the clause to which they are attached. The particular subject modified by a participial phrase depends on the phrase's position, however. Normally, the phrase modifies the subject closest to it, as "sung slowly" modifies "the song" in the first example. But in some sentences, such as the last example, a participial phrase modifies a more remote subject. Such exceptions are permissible only when the participle is obviously an inappropriate modifier for the closest subject--as "not wishing to embarrass him" is obviously an inappropriate modifier for "his error."

Since a participial phrase is an adjectival phrase, there must always be an appropriate subject for it to modify in the attached clause. If no such subject is present there, the participle is said to "dangle." Strictly speaking, a dangling participle makes no sense in a sentence. A depressingly common example of a dangling participle occurs in the sentence *Based on what he told me, I dropped the class*. The participle here doesn't make sense because neither of the subjects in the attached clause--neither *I* nor *the class*--is an appropriate subject for the modifier: neither *I* nor *the class* is "based on something." The participle in the following sentence does have an appropriate subject, however: *Based on years of research, the report was extremely long*. In this case the **report** is based on years of research.

**R7: Adjectival participial phrases normally modify the noun closest to them in a sentence, and they should be punctuated in the way that R4 requires clause modifiers to be punctuated.**

**Exercise 11: Some of the following sentences contain dangling modifiers. Identify those defective modifiers.**

Not wishing to hurt her feelings, he said he thought the dress very pretty.  
Unable to agree on where to put the city hall, the whole building project came to a halt.  
Irritated at his frequent absences, the custodian was asked to resign.  
Smiling quietly at the jury, Sir Tolbert said that he would call one more witness.  
Having spent seven years in the third grade, the other boys were much smaller than Murchison.  
Strolling down the main street of Los Angeles, South Bend was a million miles away.  
Being a hopeless old drunk, nobody would have anything to do with him.  
Based on those letters, she was scared shitless. (Patricia D. Cornwell.)  
Happy to have her with us again, Angela was kissed by everyone present.  
Crushed by the unexpected criticism, a tear rolled down her cheek.  
Not having been caught early enough, the infection spread dangerously.  
Feeling hot and thirsty, the glass of sarsaparilla tasted very good.  
Having very little money, college was quite out of the question.

Taken quite aback by the enthusiasm of the class, Miss Driscoll's lip trembled slightly.  
 Unwilling to move the high school, another route was chosen for the freeway.  
 Tormented by what he had done, a full confession seemed the only answer.  
 Returning to Lyon thirty years later, everything was just the same.  
 Tired of being a waiter, Andrews dumped the soup on the customer's head and walked out.  
 Resentful at being passed over again, a plan for revenge began to grow in his mind.  
 Bursting splendidly in the night sky, Johanson marveled at the fireworks.  
 In reaching for a second helping, his shoulder was dislocated.  
 Stepping back to view the picture, Milton's face wore a smile of satisfaction.  
 Sneaking into the locker room at night, seven basketballs were stolen.  
 Winding its way down the valley, the stream finally empties into the Mississippi river.  
 Peering at the congregation, Reverend Gordon wished he had chosen another profession.

A modifying phrase closely related to a participial phrase is an **absolute phrase**. Absolute phrases--for example, *time being called* in the context of *Time being called, the game was stopped*--are sometimes mistaken for clauses, because they contain both a noun phrase and a verb phrase, but their verb phrase is a participle that is adjectival to the noun phrase. When an adjectival phrase is attached to a noun phrase, the result is a bigger noun phrase. Absolute phrases are therefore noun phrases; they are noun phrases attached to clauses as clause-modifiers. Another example of a sentence containing an absolute phrase is *He glanced at the waiter, his face flushed*. The two examples show that an absolute phrase can go on either side of the clause that it modifies. Like other clause modifiers, an absolute phrase is set off by a comma.

7 Absolute phrases owe their name to the fact that their meaning is self-contained and “independent of” the ideas expressed by the clause to which they are attached. Thus, in *The car having stalled, we got out and walked*, the idea of the car stalling is independent of the idea of the subjects’ getting out and walking. Reflection shows that sentences containing absolute phrases are closely related to sentences containing subordinate clauses. *The car having stalled, we got out and walked* is clearly equivalent to *Since the car stalled, we got out and walked*; *Tom being a coward, the thief got away* is clearly equivalent to *Because Tom was a coward, the thief got away*; and *He glanced at me, his face flushed* is clearly equivalent to *When he glanced at me, his face was flushed*. Since they lack subordinating conjunctions, sentences containing absolute phrases are tighter, more concise than related sentences with conjunctions. As one can see from the examples in **Exercise 10**, absolute phrases are extremely common in contemporary fiction.

**R6: Absolute phrases should be treated as clause modifiers and punctuated according to rule R4.**

**Exercise 10: Identify the absolute phrases in the following sentences, and indicate whether those sentences are properly punctuated:**

His mother having been an actress he knew the theater very well.

The bay door was open, one of the morgue assistants hosing off the concrete. (Patricia Cornwell.)

They found a bar and drank beer through the afternoon, Jack telling Ennis about a lightning storm on the mountain the year before that killed forty-two sheep, [about] the peculiar stink of them and the way they bloated, [and about] the need for plenty of whiskey up there. (Annie Proulx, “Brokeback Mountain,” *New Yorker*, Oct. 13, ‘97.)

John left that party early that night, his mother wondering why.

The gate being locked, she rang for the porter.

right Disengaged she was cold, her four limbs outstretched, and she developed the disquieting habit of referring to his penis in the third person. (Paul Theroux, *Jungle Lovers*.)

Grace moved to the bed and flopped down on it, her long, chalk-white legs protruding extensively from her kimono.

She lifted her head from the scrawled handwriting on the mauve crested paper and nodded wearily toward the hearthrug where eighteen year-old Charlie stood, her hair awry, her eyes closed, her face purple with indignation, her clenched fists beating against her tweed-covered thighs, kicking up this extraordinary hullabaloo. (These last two sentences are from John Mortimer, *Paradise Regained*.)

It was something that expatriates seemed to relish, and Bunt, who was not an expatriate but Hong Kong born and bred, regarded it as pure foolishness, that worst of English traits, eccentricity for its own sake, making a vice into a virtue, a maddening nuisance into something lovable. (Paul Theroux, *Kowloon Tong* (NY, 1997), p. 125.)

tlpar

A final sort of modifier usually requiring the insertion of a comma in a sentence is an **appositive**. Like a participial phrase, an appositive modifies a noun or noun phrase; but it is not apt to be taken for a clause modifier. An appositive is sometimes called an “explanatory adjunct” to a noun or noun phrase that it modifies; it is said to be **in apposition to** that noun or noun phrase. In the following sentences the phrases in bold type are appositives:

s148The teacher, **a vigorous young man**, eagerly led the class.

My father--**scholar, athlete, leader**--was in the forefront of his class.

My brother **Ron** is a salesman (said by someone with more than one brother).

Professor Moriarity, **cruel and cunning**, was Holmes’ greatest enemy.

I inscribed the book to Mary, **an eager student of philosophy who hoped to become a professor**.

2832

Normally, appositives immediately follow the nouns or phrases that they modify, but sometimes they immediately precede them, as in ***A cruel man, Jones lost no sleep after firing Harris.***

When appositives are nonrestrictive, or not needed to identify the referent of the noun they modify, they are normally set off by commas, as in example 1. If, however, a nonrestrictive appositive contains one or more commas within it, it may be set off by dashes, as in the second example. Finally, if the appositive is restrictive, as it is in sentence 3, it should not be set off by commas. (The appositive ***Ron*** is restrictive in sentence 3 because it is needed to identify the particular brother the speaker is referring to.) Example 4 shows that appositives may consist of adjectives, and example 5 shows that they may be expanded to include relative clauses.

**R8: When appositives are nonrestrictive, they are set off by commas unless they contain commas within in them--in which case they may be set off by dashes.**

**Exercise 12: Identify the appositives in the following sentences, and indicate whether they are restrictive or nonrestrictive:**

Pert little curls, the sort that are seen only in good photographs, wound toward her cheeks in springy tendrils, suggesting that she was gay and, probably, vivacious.

Her phrase was ‘having sex,’ a precise emphasis characteristic of her need, with a convenient balance of associations, suggesting appetite and regularity and a smattering of passion but not love.

A married couple could be an awful thing, with two heads and eight limbs, a monstrous octopus really, with a huge appetite and a short life.

He wore a hearing aid, a bulky cream-colored plug in his right ear, with a wire looping down his starched bush-shirt to a small mental box hung from his neck on a harness.

Auntie Zeeba’s Eating House (*‘More than a bar...’*), a rambling tin-roofed brothel, had a wide covered verandah and deck chairs where, in slack hours, the girls sat, hooting amiably at passers-by. (These first five sentences are from Paul Theroux, *Jungle Lovers*.)

His uncle Henry was a former war hero with a drooping mustache and rumpled trousers.

Later Agnes and Fred, more or less composed, were standing hand in hand by the car.

He saw the sights of his childhood, the bridge and the broad river made for pleasure, the moored punts and canoes and white launches, the willows and pubs by the water.

A long war, widely thought to have defeated the forces of tyranny and injustice and ushered in the age of the Common Man, whoever he was, had been over for three years.

The manservant Wyebrow opened the front door, gave a quick look to assure himself that the Rector was not on all fours, and crossed the hall to knock on the drawing-room door and so produced a sound which was lost in the mounting crescendo of screams which came from the other side of the door, an outcry which had been audible in the driveway and had sent the rooks chattering out of the trees on the other side of the kitchen garden. (These last four sentences are from John Mortimer, *Paradise Postponed*..)

**A note on style:** A sentence containing nouns modified by relative clauses can be shortened and often made more effective by putting appositives or participles in place of such clauses. *I gave the book to Mary Smith, an old friend I met in college* is certainly preferable to *I gave the book to Mary Smith, who is an old friend whom I met in college*, and *A sentence containing a noun modified by a relative clause is invariably complex* is equally preferable to *A sentence that contains a noun that is modified by a relative clause is invariably complex*. The following sentence by John Mortimer, in which three appositives occur in place of relative clauses, is a beautiful example of the concision that can be achieved in this way:

After the funeral service many of the congregation, some starting to chatter, others lighting cigarettes, all relieved that the worst was over, crowded into the Rectory to be met by Dorothy with a look of considerable dismay.

If this sentence had been constructed in the style favored by many academics, it might have been written this way:

After the funeral service, many of the congregation--some of whom started to chatter, others of whom lit cigarettes, and all of whom were relieved that the worst was over--crowded into the Rectory to be met by Dorothy, who responded to them with a look of considerable dismay.

Academic writing is, in general, loaded with relative clauses, and it would be much less tedious to read if most of those clauses were replaced by shorter, more vigorous modifiers. Removing *that's* and *which's* and also substituting the active for the passive voice (putting *so and so thinks* for *it is thought by so and so*) will greatly improve almost any academic paper.

**Exercise 13:** *Replace the relative clauses in the following sentences with shorter, more vigorous modifiers. Indicate what sort of modifiers you use as replacements for the relative clauses:*

[To be completed.]

### **Parenthetical Expressions**

One of the most important uses of commas is to set off **words and phrases that occur parenthetically** in a sentence. In such cases **two** commas are required unless the parenthetical material comes at the end of the sentence. Some of the expressions I have already discussed--for instance, nonrestrictive relative clauses and appositives--are actually parenthetical, and the same is true of **words of direct address** and many other locutions. The following sentences contain examples of commas that enclose parenthetical material:

You may, **if you insist**, demand your money back.  
Tom, **I think**, is the best at algebra.  
She knew, **nevertheless**, that she was right.

My sister, **you will be pleased to hear**, has recovered from her illness.

When commas are used to set off parenthetical material, the material set off can be removed from the sentence without affecting the sense of the remaining words. The effect of the commas is basically the same as the effect of parentheses, but parentheses can set off independent clauses (as commas cannot) and they make the matter they enclose seem less important than the rest of the paragraph: they often imply, as one writer has said, that what they contain is incidental or digressive and could almost be skipped by the reader. It is important to remember that parenthetical commas **come in pairs** except when the material set off occurs at the end of a sentence. To omit one comma or the other in such cases is as bad an error as omitting one of a pair of parentheses.

**R9: Words and phrases occurring parenthetically in a sentence may be set off by commas unless clarity requires dashes, parentheses, or brackets. (See R13 below.) An independent clause occurring parenthetically must always be set off by dashes, parentheses, or brackets.**

### Other Rules For Using Commas

1. **Prepositional phrases.** For phrases such as *in the house*, *like a dog*, and *by the way*, the appropriate punctuation is described by the rule:

**R10: Prepositional phrases are not set off by commas unless (a) they are used as a clause modifier, (b) they are fairly long, (c) the object of the preposition is a verbal phrase, or (d) they are needed to avoid awkwardness or ambiguity.**

ilv112 The following examples illustrate these matters; the prepositional phrases are indicated by bold type:

Tom sat **on a bench by the pond**. (Comma not needed for either prepositional phrase.)

**In fact**, she was a philosophy student. (Phrase used as clause modifier.)

**On the top of the building having a large television antenna**, there is an observation gallery. (Comma needed because of long prepositional phrase.)

**By working nights**, I was able to support myself. (Comma needed because object of *by* is a verbal phrase.)

The following three sentences, in which the prepositional phrases do not appear in bold type, would be less awkward if they contained commas:

In writing subordinate clauses are very common.

Before eating Sam took a pill.

On horses bridles are important.

2. **Items in a series.** The rule to follow for such contexts is this:

**R11:** Commas should be used to separate words, phrases, and clauses that are part of a series of three or more items **unless** those items contain commas within them--in which case they should be separated by **semicolons**.

The first part of the rule is illustrated by itself (since it contains a series of three words) and by the following examples:

For breakfast he had bacon, eggs, and muffins.

Tom's dog loves to eat, to sleep, and to run--in that order.

The man who cuts the grass, who rakes the yard, and who clips the shrubs is an old friend of mine.



Note: In British English the final comma before the *and* in a series like the above is regularly omitted; in American English it is normally required.

The qualification to the rule is illustrated by a paragraph describing the author of a recent novel:

Ian McEwan has written two collections of short stories--*First Love, Last Rites*, which won the Somerset Maugham Award, and *In Between the Sheets*--and six other novels: *The Cement Garden*; *The Comfort of Strangers*, short-listed for the 1981 Booker Prize; *The Child of Time*, winner of the 1987 Whitbread Novel of the Year Award; *The Innocent*; *Black Dogs*; and *Enduring Love*. He lives in London.

The series following the colon in the first sentence contains titles of the author's books, but some of the titles are accompanied by appositives set off by commas, and it would be difficult to distinguish them if they were separated merely by commas. A rule introduced in connection with appositives, **R8**, is also illustrated by the first sentence, for the appositive following "two collections of short stories" also contains commas within it. **R8** instructs us to set off such appositives by dashes rather than commas.

3. **Coordinate Adjectives.** The final rule for commas concerns **coordinate adjectives not separated by a conjunction**. Adjectives are coordinate when they are or could be separated by *and*; thus *big* and *bold* are coordinate, because they are separated by *and* in the sentence *Mary wanted a big and bold guard dog*. If the *and* in this sentence were removed, a comma should separate the coordinate adjectives: *Mary wanted a big, bold guard dog*. Although *guard* is also an adjective in this sentence, it is not coordinate with *big* and *bold*. We know this because it would not make sense to put an *and* between *bold* and *guard*. *Mary wanted a big and bold and guard dog* is a defective English sentence.

**R12: Coordinate adjectives not separated by a conjunction should be separated by a comma.**

**EXERCISE 14:** *Insert commas where needed in the following sentences.*

djustright He bought a ball of twine a jackknife and a bottle of olive oil.

John opened one eye looked owlshly about the loom and decided to stay in bed.

The Macedonian peasants are very poor and gain a precarious living from long hours of toil.

The doctor said that Albert would live and that they might be able to save his arm.

We were shocked at the ugly angry oaths that issued from her pretty little mouth.

It was perfectly true that the house was overrun by rats that the parents were seldom home and that the children were starving.

The country was bitterly cold in winter intolerably hot in summer and generally wet in spring and fall.

8. decIt therefore has considerable historic importance in my opinion.

He started the motor put the car in reverse and crashed into his mother's convertible.

He gazed pensively into the fire and thought of that strange summer so many years ago.

Who he was where he came from and what he wanted are questions which may never be answered.

The closet contained a dozen large blue red and yellow dresses.

Randolph knew instinctively what he had to do and he did not hesitate to do it.

Originally a member of the famed Vienna Circle he was as he once said the "first missionary" for logical positivism.

It is only too tempting he said to push a very difficult problem aside and by stigmatizing it as meaningless to discourage further investigation.

The accident drew twenty old young and middle-aged spectators.

A beautiful little girl opened the door and curtsied gracefully.

t360Bertram always had a smile on his lips a song in his heart and a deck of marked cards in his pocket.

In some informal discussion before the seminar started a friend and I made some scornful remarks about certain ontological claims no doubt to impress Carnap with our commitment to the tough-minded ideology he was noted for espousing.

A strange unwholesome odor rose from the marshy lands below.

0We needed a man who was fearless who would follow orders exactly and who had no relatives. Rick spent every Sunday washing polishing and lubricating his new garbage truck. As I look back on the outcome of Center discussion in the fifties I can identify their source often in problems he had with received empiricist doctrine. Bob came to the party as a pirate Pierre as a man from Mars and Nick as a glass of ginger ale. His father made him promise three things: to save a tenth of whatever he earned to attend church on Sundays and never to marry a redheaded woman.

A good *rule of thumb* for avoiding errors with commas and semicolons is this:

***Don't insert a comma or semicolon unless you have a clear reason for doing so. An acceptable reason should specify a rule or indicate why the context makes a comma or semicolon advisable even though no rule positively calls for it.***

#### **Checklist For Using Commas:**

***Are you joining clauses with a coordinating or subordinating conjunction?***

***Are you attaching a clause modifier to a clause?*** (Such modifiers include adjectives such as **probably**, conjunctive adjectives such as **however**, and absolute phrases such as **Tom being tired**. Adjectival participial phrases such as **being angry at Betty** are punctuated in the same way as clause modifiers, remember.)

***Are you introducing a word or phrase parenthetically?*** (Remember that parenthetical material includes *nonrestrictive relative clauses* and *nonrestrictive appositives*.)

***Are you beginning a sentence with a lengthy propositional phrase or a prepositional phrase whose object is a verbal phrase?***

***Are you introducing items in an X, Y, and Z series?***

***Are you separating coordinate adjectives not joined by a conjunction?***

***Do you need a comma for the elementary reason that you are introducing a date or salutation, or are closing a letter?***

0***Are you faced with a special case in which you think a comma is needed for clarity even though none of the preceding questions calls for one?***

#### **Checklist for using semicolons:**

***1. Are you joining independent clauses not connected with a conjunction?***

***2. Are you joining independent clauses connected by a conjunction when at least one of the clauses contains conjunctions within it?***

***3. Are you joining independent clauses connected by a conjunctive adverb?***

***4. Are you introducing items in an X, Y, and Z series, where X, Y, or Z contains a comma within it?***

**Exercise 15: Insert appropriate punctuation into the sentences of the following paragraphs:**

Kant began his approach to the moral law by saying that if we reflect on our ordinary moral consciousness we shall have to agree that the only thing in or out of the world that is good without qualification is a good will. As you might expect in making this claim Kant had some philosophical opponents tacitly in mind opponents who contend that among earthly things at least happiness is an unqualified good. But Kant insisted that ordinary people have no doubt that happiness is good only when it does not interfere with such things as just punishment or the atonement for wrongs. To nail down his position Kant proceeded to run through a list of things plausibly held to be good. Invariably he found that they are good only on this or that condition. Unlike a good will they are not absolutely good.

Although Kant's claims here are plausible we are surely entitled to ask what he took a good will to be. His answer is that *a good will is one that acts for the sake of the moral law*. An imperfect being like us will be conscious of the moral law as an imperative as something commanding certain sorts of actions. A perfect being which Kant called a "holy will" will not of course be conscious of the law this way for this kind of being will not have to be constrained or ordered to do the right thing. A perfect being will conform to the law by virtue of its very nature it will freely do the right thing because the right thing will be determined by what a perfect will wills. One of the forms in which this appears in Kant's doctrine there are others is that the moral law amounts to a fundamental intention in accordance with which a holy or perfectly rational will thinks and acts. But more on this later.

If the only thing good without qualification is a thing that acts for the sake of the moral law then the value of the moral law cannot be subservient to some further object of value some *summum bonum*. On the contrary it is the moral law that renders good wills good they are good because of their relation to the law, and there are no other unqualified goods in relation to which the law could possess its value. Its value is intrinsic it is that by which unqualified goods are defined. This is a revolutionary claim for moral philosophy. According to most alternative views moral principles are justified as means to a moral end the prescriptions or proscriptions the do's or don't they involve will bring about or at least help bring about if they are obeyed a moral *summum bonum*. Kant's principal philosophical opponents in matters of morality the utilitarians hold that the *summum bonum* is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Kant not only denied that happiness even the greatest happiness is good without qualification he insisted that the intended results of a good will are sometimes as in the case of justice at odds with such happiness.

I said just a minute ago that imperfect beings are conscious of the moral law as an imperative. According to Kant imperatives may be either hypothetical or categorical. A hypothetical imperative commands one to do something on some hypothetical condition it tells one to do something A *if and when* some condition C is satisfied. A categorical imperative by contrast conveys a categorical command it tells one to do something with no *if's and's* or *but's* about it. Kant thought it is obvious that the moral law is unqualified and unconditional it requires us to act in a certain way a way called "being moral" with no *if's* or *and's* about it. Thus the moral law is a *categorical* imperative. The fact that it is a categorical imperative gives us another reason Kant thought for rejecting a teleological conception of morality a conception based on a *cf* *summum bonum*. To acknowledge that the moral law is a categorical imperative is tantamount to acknowledging Kant thought that the moral law or what it requires is intrinsically acceptable to a rational being. It is not acceptable as a means of securing some *telos* or end.

## COLONS, DASHES, PARENTHESES, AND BRACKETS.

**Colons** are used mainly to introduce lists or explanations of some kind. Here are some examples:

1. Jones had three main interests: philosophy, football, and women.
2. He had a perfectly good reason for teaching school: he liked being a teacher.
3. This I believe: All human beings are created equal and must enjoy equally the rights that are inalienably theirs.

Generally, you should have a full sentence pattern before a colon. You should therefore avoid writing such sentences as "Tom's major interests were: acting, drinking, and laughing." It is better to say, "Tom's major interests were acting, drinking, and laughing." As example 3 illustrates, you should capitalize long formal statements introduced by colons.

**R13: Colons are used to introduce lists or explanatory clauses; they should be preceded by a complete sentence.**

**Dashes** have the following principal uses:

1. They are sometimes used in place of colons, as a less formal means of punctuation. Example: *Tom had three interests-acting, drinking, and laughing.*

2. They are sometimes used to set off material in sentences when commas, if used for that purpose, would be awkward or confusing, or when the material set off is an independent clause. Illustrative examples are *Three women-Sally, Mary, and Jane-ran the show* (commas would be confusing here) and *A man of his age-he was ninety-eight in August of that year-should not be playing football* (the material set off is an independent clause).
3. Dashes are also used to indicate an interruption or break in thought--from hesitation, suspense, or whatnot. They are used this way in *I have tried to forgive and forget--but I can't* and *We can go on and on increasing our armaments until--well, I don't know until what or when.*

**R14: Dashes may be used in place of colons as a less formal means of punctuation; they may be used to set off material in sentences when commas, if used for that purpose, would be awkward or confusing, or when the material set off is an independent clause; and they may be used to indicate an interruption or break in thought.**

Parentheses and brackets are used almost exclusively to set off material within a sentence. Commas and dashes may be used for this purpose, too, but these devices differ in strength. Brackets are strongest, making material seem most incidental to the content of a sentence, then parentheses, then dashes, and then commas. Unlike commas, these other parenthetical devices may set off independent clauses. Brackets are normally used to set off material inserted into a quotation--as in "According to the Globe critic, "This [*Man and Superman*] is one of Shaw's greatest plays" or inserted into material already enclosed in parentheses--as in "See 'René Descartes' (M.C. Beardsley, *The European Philosophers from Descartes to Nietzsche* [New York, 1960]).

**R15: Brackets, parentheses, dashes, and commas may all be used to set off material that is parenthetical in a sentence. Brackets are strongest, making material seem most incidental to the content of a sentence, then parentheses, then dashes, and then commas.**

**EXERCISE 16:** *Some of the following sentences need colons, semicolons, dashes, parentheses, or dashes. Supply the needed punctuation.*

He had just one ambition to get out of the Army.

His experience in South America he had been fifteen years in the Amazon made him a natural choice for the appointment.

He packed only a few of the most necessary items socks, shoes, underwear.

4. 60 We knew there was little hope of succeeding nevertheless we felt we had to try.

The girls chosen for the final judging were Laurabell, Eloise, and Mary.

Her father a grumpy, irascible type if there ever was one met him at the door.

Three animals a horse, a camel, and a bear were led across the stage.

The only explanation we could find to account for his behavior was that he had lost his mind

Some lawyers Sir Tolbert Willoughby-Hughes, for example make a great deal of money.

He didn't really have anything more to say he just couldn't bring himself to say good-by.

One fact stood out with perfect clarity that Summerwell was the only real officer on the ship.

His only daughter Edna Bixby, a teacher of French at Franklin High School lived with him and kept house for him.

The continuing bad weather it had now been raining almost steadily for three weeks had made the roads virtually impassable.

hang He couldn't seem to get one thing through his head that he had no authority to change the curriculum.

The next day's journey was a long one therefore we decided to leave before dawn.

As Tom observed, "Like the professor said *sic*, 'Students who don't study don't pass'."

**Exercise 17: Insert appropriate punctuation into the sentences of the following paragraphs:**

Herbert Feigl came to Minnesota in 1940. He had immigrated to this country from Austria ten years earlier spending the intervening years mainly at the University of Iowa. Originally a member of the famed Vienna Circle he was as he once said the "first missionary" for logical positivism. In 1941 he did not actually consider himself a positivist however by that time he had moved on to the successor position that he called "logical empiricism" an epithet he used as the title of a programmatic article that he published in 1943 and subsequently used as the introduction for the influential anthology *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* which he and Sellars issued in 1949.

I shall describe the kind of analytic philosophy that Feigl endorsed in "Logical Empiricism" but before doing so I want say something about the philosophical scene that Feigl encountered when he came here in 1940. I can't say a lot about that scene because it was before my time and I don't have access to the pertinent records. Yet I do remember "Perry" (George Perrigo) Conger who was here before Feigl and still chairman of the department in 1950 when I visited the university as a prospective student and I heard many stories during my undergraduate years about Aulbury Castell another important department member who preceded Feigl and left the university before I arrived. (Castell was one of the creators of the Humanities Program a robustly non-analytic enterprise greatly valued by undergraduates of my generation.) Both Conger and Castell published a fair amount the UMass library has six books written or edited by Conger and five written or edited by Castell and it is clear that neither of these men was an analytic philosopher. Conger a Presbyterian minister whom I remember as a kind and gentle man a man I terrified in I think his eighties by driving him back from a talk at St. Thomas College in a little Renault *Quatre Chevaux* I had that turned into the curves of that part of the River Road too quickly and too abruptly for his comfort was an "integrator" of knowledge some of the titles of his books are "Synoptic Naturalism" "The Ideologies of Religion" "New Views of Evolution" and "Theories of Macrocosms and Microcosms in the History of Philosophy. Castell as I know from reading his *Modern Introduction to Philosophy* in my sophomore year was a more secular thinker than Conger but as we can infer from the claims of Augustine Castle the dialectically astute but anti-behaviorist opponent of B. F. Skinner's protagonist in *Walden Two* he was a long way away from Feigl's logical empiricism. (Skinner who taught in the Psychology Department here before going to Harvard was a regular participant I was told in discussions Castell regularly held in his apartment near Dinkytown and as I was also told he regularly disagreed with the position Castell took in those discussions.)

The Second World War broke out (for the United States) shortly after Feigl's arrival here and in consequence of it the philosophy department was apparently a fairly quiet and uneventful place until the war ended and the "boys" the students came back. But things became quite lively thereafter. Wilfrid Sellars arrived in 1946 and it couldn't have been long until John Hospers and May Brodbeck were also there for their names along with that of Paul Meehl accompanied those of Feigl and Sellars on early issues of *Philosophical Studies*: they must have been here together when the journal was created or they may have created it together. Michael Scriven, Burnham Terrill, and Francis Raab all analytic philosophers were here in the early fifties when I was an undergraduate and so were Paul Homer a Kierkegaard scholar and philosopher of religion and Mary Shaw a historian of philosophy who became my favorite undergraduate teacher in spite of my exposure to John Hospers's superb courses and before that to Burnam Terrill's introduction to philosophy which hooked me on the subject. (Burnam's TA in the course was by the way none other than Hector-Neri Castaneda an enthusiastic discussion leader but sometimes a perplexing one. One day he had me seriously baffled by his remarks about "trasses" in the snow the mysterious trasses turned out to be footprints. This reference to Hector reminds me that I knew all the faculty in the famous photo of the department that was taken in Wesbrook Hall in the mid 50's a photo showing that the department was ahead of its time in gender matters for two of the six senior professors one-third were women. A person in the photo whom I have not yet mentioned was Alan Donagan he joined the department in about 1956 and remained here for I think four years. He eventually took over John Hospers's courses in aesthetics and with Mary Shaw he co-directed my M.A. thesis on a topic in aesthetics that I worked out with Hospers before he left the university.)

"Philosophical analysis" seems to have been the favorite adjective of the philosophy department in the early fifties. Not only did Feigl and Sellars entitle their anthology "Readings in Philosophical Analysis" but Hospers entitled his textbook the first edition of which he published in 1953 "Introduction to Philosophical Analysis" and Wilfrid Sellars referred to his graduate seminar as "the analysis seminar" I think its official name was "Seminar in Philosophical Analysis." What did they mean by "philosophical analysis"? Probably not the same thing though they might not have realized it the early fifties they certainly did so by 1960 when I finished my Ph.D. Feigl and Sellars summarized their view in their preface to *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*. It is surprisingly inclusive:

The conception of philosophical analysis underlying our selections they say springs from two major traditions in recent thought the Cambridge movement deriving from Moore and Russell and the Logical

Positivism of the Vienna Circle Wittgenstein, Schlick, Carnap together with the Scientific Empiricism of the Berlin group led by Reichenbach. These together with related developments in America stemming from Realism and Pragmatism and the relatively independent contributions of the Polish logicians have increasingly merged to create an approach to philosophical problems which we frankly consider a decisive turn in the history of philosophy.

If you read Feigl's "Logical Empiricism" you will see that the empiricism he espoused was in the forefront of empiricist thinking at the time and closely related to orthodox philosophical thought in English-speaking countries today. The philosophical tradition he represented centered its chief inquiries he said around two humble questions "What do you mean?" and "How do you know?" A fundamental tool for him in the proper pursuit of the first question was a "confirmation criterion" of factual meaning according to which no sentence is factually meaningful if it is not in principle capable of being confirmed or disconfirmed--that is, as he also put it, of being tested at least indirectly and incompletely. Although no one at least to my knowledge espouses this kind of meaning criterion today the last to do so was Carnap who published his final paper on the subject in the first volume of *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* most main-line analytic philosophers nevertheless share the spirit of Feigl's attitude to factual assertions that do not satisfy such a criterion they don't pay any attention to them. To say this is not to imply or suggest that some of the objects or entities main-line philosophers recognize today would be enthusiastically embraced by Feigl possible worlds are perhaps a case in point. But those who speak of such things with a good conscience David Lewis is the obvious example here always emphasize the rational basis they have for postulating them.

### List of Rules Cited

#### Rules for Commas:

- R1:** If C1 and C2 are independent clauses, they may be joined together in just two ways: either (1) by using a semicolon according to the pattern of **C1; C2** or (2) by using a coordinating conjunction (such as **and, but, yet or, nor, for, because, so**) together with a comma according to the pattern, **C1, c-conj C2**.
- R2:** When independent clauses are joined by a conjunctive adverb, the resulting compound should be punctuated this way: (a) the independent clauses should be separated by a semicolon; (b) the conjunctive adverb should be attached to one of the clauses rather than the other; and (c) the conjunctive adverb should be set off from the clause to which it is attached by a comma.
- R3:** If a dependent clause is attached to the beginning or the end of an independent clause, the two clauses are separated by a comma. If the dependent clause is placed within the independent clause, the dependent clause should be set off by commas **unless** it is attached to a noun (or noun phrase) as a **restrictive** modifier.
- Reminder:** A restrictive modifier combines with the noun it modifies to form a phrase that identifies an object of reference; it does not merely provide information about an object otherwise identified. (See page 6 above.)
- R4:** A clause modifier should be separated from the clause it modifies either by one comma, if it occurs at the beginning or the end of the clause, or by two commas, if it occurs somewhere within the clause.
- R5:** If a conjunction does not connect clauses, it should not be accompanied by a comma.
- R6:** Absolute phrases should be treated as clause modifiers and punctuated according to rule R4.
- R7:** Adjectival participial phrases should modify the noun closest to them in a sentence, and they should be punctuated in the way that R4 requires clause modifiers to be punctuated.

- R8:** When appositives are nonrestrictive, they are set off by commas unless they contain commas within in them--in which case they may be set off by dashes.
- R9:** Words and phrases occurring parenthetically in a sentence may be set off by commas unless clarity requires dashes, parentheses, or brackets. (See R13 below.) An **independent clause** occurring parenthetically must always be set off by dashes, parentheses, or brackets.
- R10:** Prepositional phrases are not set off by commas unless (a) they are used as clause modifiers, (b) they are fairly long, (c) their objects are verbal phrases such as *buying a paper*, or (d) they are needed to avoid awkwardness or ambiguity.
- R11:** Commas should be used to separate words, phrases, and clauses that are part of a series of three or more items **unless** members of the series contains commas within them--in which case they should be separated by **semicolons**.
- R12:** Coordinate adjectives not separated by a conjunction should be separated by a comma.

#### **Rules for Colons, Dashes, etc.:**

- R13:** Colons are used to introduce lists or explanatory clauses; they should be preceded by a complete sentence.
- R14:** Dashes may be used in place of colons as a less formal means of punctuation; they may be used to to set off material in sentences when commas, if used for that purpose, would be awkward or confusing, or when the material set off is an independent clause; and they may be used to indicate an interruption or break in thought.
- R15:** Brackets, parentheses, dashes, and commas may all be used to set off material that is parenthetical in a sentence. Brackets are strongest, making material seem most incidental to the content of a sentence, then parentheses, then dashes, and then commas.