



**NEW YORK CITY
COLLEGE OF
TECHNOLOGY**

The Writing Center
presents:
**Sentence-level
choices**

A WAY TO THINK ABOUT PUNCTUATION

Punctuation shows the relationships between ideas—it can help the reader see how ideas are connected or separated.

Beyond the “rules” of punctuation that you follow, you can also think about how good punctuation helps you get a message across. It contributes to writing style.

INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT CLAUSES

Independent clauses have a subject and a verb and can stand as a sentence on their own.

Example:

The researchers were surprised.

Dependent clauses cannot stand as sentences on their own.

Example:

After completing the experiment

PERIOD

The period is the hard stop of punctuation. Stylistically, it shows a strong separation between ideas.

Example:

The researchers were surprised. They found that plants grew more when they were exposed to classical music.

SEMICOLON

Semicolons connect two independent clauses that could be sentences on their own. Stylistically, they represent two ideas that are related to each other.

Example:

The researchers were surprised; they found that plants grew more when they were exposed to classical music.

COMMAS AND COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

You can remember the coordinating conjunctions as FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

They can connect independent clauses along with a conjunction.

Example:

*The researchers did not think classical music would have any effect, **but** it did help plants grow.*

COMMAS AND DEPENDENT CLAUSES

A sentence with an independent clause and a dependent clause is called a complex sentence. Commas can be used to connect the two.

Example:

After completing the experiment, the researchers were surprised.

COMMAS AND LISTS

Commas separate ideas in lists.

Example:

The researchers purchased their supplies: seeds, soil, and buckets.

COLON

A colon can either introduce a list or connect two independent clauses. Stylistically, when you use a colon to connect two independent clauses, it means that the information in the second independent clause should get the emphasis.

Examples:

The researchers purchased their supplies: seeds, soil, and buckets.

The results were clear: plants respond to pleasant stimuli.

EM DASH

The em dash is like the wild west of punctuation—it can replace a period, semicolon, or colon. Visually and stylistically, it creates emphasis.

Examples:

The research were clear—though hard to believe—plants respond to pleasant stimuli.

She had never seen anything like it—the plant grew much faster than the control group that was not exposed to classical music.

PRACTICE: CHANGE THE PUNCTUATION

She used to think about calling her friend back, today she doesn't think about it anymore.

Before adding three drops of red dye. My lab partner checked to make sure that the water levels were correct and they checked to make sure that the temperature was stable.

It's clear that a change needs to happen the people need better access to the vaccine.

GRAMMAR-PRONOUN REFERENCE

Watch out when you start a sentence with “it” “this” or “that.” It may not feel clear to the reader what you’re referring to.

Example:

It shows how societal views have developed in relation to gender.

Smith’s documentary exemplifies how societal views have developed in relation to gender.

PARALLELISM

When listing, you want to be sure to use the same form of the word for each item in the list.

Example:

My mother said we children had three responsibilities: praying, to go to school, and doing our chores.

My mother said we children had three responsibilities: praying, going to school, and doing our chores.

WORDY VS. CONCISE

It's natural when you're drafting to include extra words in your sentences. When you're proofreading, though, look for phrases that can be cut and condensed.

Example:

With evidence, there is a very strong case for the fact that the more dependent we become on technology the more privacy we lose because of that.

The more dependent we become on technology, the more privacy we lose.

TENSE

You generally want to maintain verb tense throughout a given paragraph. Often when we draft we switch between tenses, and we need to proofread to fix it.

In general, literature and film analysis should be in present tense. Historical events are discussed in past tense. Personal narratives told in the past may lapse into present tense to draw the reader in, but it's rare, should be done on purpose, and the whole paragraph should maintain one tense.

PROOFREADING TOOLS

After you know that all of the content in your paper is how you want it to be, you want to proofread to catch these sentence-level concerns we've been talking about. Some tools:

- Read your paper out loud
- Read “backward”
- Use [grammarly.com](https://www.grammarly.com)



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