

Punctuation: commons (,)

Rule #1: After introductory words/phrases/clauses:

First, we must consider the site of the structure.

Fortunately, we will have a new president soon.

“In the early 1900s, the oil and motion picture industry affected the landscape in a number of ways.”¹

“While many industries suffered in the Depression, the movie industry did not”.²

Rule #2: In lists (comma before “and”)

“Oil derricks, gas stations, and movie theatres sprang up all over the country.”³

Rule #3: Before conjunctions when a complete sentence follows

Everyone complains about the traffic in Los Angeles, yet no one is willing to give up his or her car.

Rule #4: To separate participial phrases (-ing phrase usually)

The federal government subsidized the growth of Los Angeles, paying for most of its freeway construction.

Taking all her work into consideration, I decided she deserved an A for the course.

Rule #5: To separate appositives/wh-clauses that give extra (non-essential) information:

Frank Gehry, the noted architect, changed his name because his first wife asked him to.

The Stata Center on the MIT campus, which was designed by Gehry, attracts a good number of tourists each year.

Punctuation: the double dash (--)

To set off extra information, particularly if the information contains commas:

The car has tured parents – usually the mother – into a chauffeur.

Three universities – Princeton, Harvard, and MIT – accepted her into their graduate program.

¹ Kunstler, James Howard. *Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Man Landscape*. Reprint ed. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994, p. 211. ISBN: 0671888250.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 209.

“Scientific advances spawned by the new industrial order rapidly translated into scores of useful and marvelous devices, promising to improve the lives of ordinary people. One fantastic thing after another had been invented – the telephone, electric lighting, the phonograph, the linotype machine, the zipper, and much more – all within the last half of the nineteenth century.”⁴

To set off phrases with “i.e.” (“that is”)

Designers who employ expressive forms – i.e., non-geometric forms – are currently popular.

Punctuation: the hyphen (-)

To create a new adjective (BEFORE a noun) out of two previously-existing words:

“The American house has been TV-centered for three generations.”⁵

The law does nothing to preserve farms, but rather promotes land-devouring sprawl and prevents the formation of coherent new towns.

I sincerely hope that the currently popular gas-guzzling SUVs eventually go out of style.

examples: structurally-specific tasks, economically-advanced countries

Punctuation: quotation marks (“ ”)

To call attention to a particular word or phrase, often created for special usage:

The term “sustainable development” was coined in 1987. (Sometimes writers will use *italics* instead of quotation marks to set off technical terms)

“The buildings that we tend to call ‘great’ are those which change the course of events.”⁶

“During the 1700s in England, the aristocracy had practiced a method of private park-making in which property was carefully graded, lakes dug, and trees asymmetrically planted in an elaborate effort to give a “natural” effect.”⁷

⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

⁶ Ballantyne, Andrew. *Architecture: A Very Short Introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 91. ISBN: 0192801791.

⁷ Kunstler, James Howard. *Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape*. Reprint ed. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994, p. 44. ISBN: 0671888250.

Sometimes this is done to show the writer's disagreement or problem with a word, as in the sentence above.

Punctuation: the colon (:)

For emphasis, when the word or phrase logically completes or explains the first part:

The new high-rise headquarters became the ultimate status symbol of the newest ruling class: the corporate elite.

"The office building was made possible by two technological innovations: structural steel and the elevator."⁸

No one enjoys walking around midtown Manhattan at night: it is a dead place.

Punctuation: semi-colons (;)

Stronger than a comma, less strong than a colon: used to show the relationship between two sentences. Often a transition word (conjunctive adverb) is involved:

At twenty, you have the face nature gave you; at fifty, you have the face you have earned.

Finding parking near MIT on a normal day is extremely difficult; in fact, it's almost impossible.

Punctuation: *italics*

With technical terms (first use), foreign words, and to set off words as such:

Spirochaeta plicatilis is a corkscrewlike bacterium.

"At the beginning of the Modern movement in architecture, anything but a flat roof was *verboten*."⁹

"Until after The Revolution, few town were worthy of the term *city*."¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

⁹ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21G.228 / 21G.227 Advanced Workshop in Writing for Social Sciences and Architecture (ELS)
Spring 2007

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.