

GENERAL RULES FOR PUNCTUATION
AND FOR THE USE OF CAPITAL LETTERS



Lieber

GENERAL RULES
FOR
PUNCTUATION

AND FOR THE
USE OF CAPITAL LETTERS.

G. N. LJEBER,

CAMBRIDGE:
CHARLES W. SEVER,
UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE.
1875.

GENERAL RULES

FOR

PUNCTUATION

AND FOR THE

USE OF CAPITAL LETTERS.

CAMBRIDGE:
CHARLES W. SEVER,
UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE.
1875.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1874, by

A. S. HILL.

In the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

Cambridge:
Press of John Wilson & Son.

PUNCTUATION.

Good sense determines the pauses which marks of punctuation indicate, and is, therefore, the guide to correct punctuation.

Since punctuation is one of the means by which a writer seeks to communicate thoughts or feelings to his readers, it must vary with thought and expression: Sterne's punctuation must differ from that of Dr. Johnson, and, though in a less degree, Burke's from that of Macaulay. Hence, no one writer—even were books printed correctly, as is rarely the case—can be taken as a model. Hence, too, a complicated system of rules loaded with exceptions, though founded upon the best usage and framed with the greatest care, is as likely to fetter thought as to aid in its communication.

Assistance may, however, be obtained from a few simple rules illustrated by examples: but it must be borne in mind that these rules, elementary as they are, may be violated, in order to avoid ambiguity or obscurity; for the purpose of every point is to *indicate the construction of the sentence* in which it occurs, and

rules and examples under them are useful only in so far as they explain and illustrate this principle.

Some principles are common to speaking or oral reading and to punctuation: but the former is directed to the *ear*, the latter to the *eye*; and the pauses required by the ear do not always correspond with the stops required by the eye.

I.

Beware of using the comma, the dash, or any one point, exclusively or to excess. Every stop has duties which no other stop can perform.

II.

Never put a mark of punctuation between two words that belong, in sense and in construction, together, as adjective and noun, subject and verb: never omit a point between two words that do not belong together.

III.

Never put a comma [,] before or after *and*, *or*, or *nor*, when employed to *connect two words belonging to the same part of speech* (a), or two expressions used as if they belonged to the same part of speech (b).

(a) In the nature of things, *greatness and unity* go together.

(a) *Sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish*, I give my hand and my heart to this vote.

(b) The new order of things was inducing *luxury of manners and a departure from the ancient strictness*.

"Value of a comma" - see slip pasted
on fly-leaf in my copy of Pomeroy's Sedgwick's

IV.

Always use the comma when there are *more than two* such words or expressions, even though *and, or, or nor* is retained (a); or when, there being only two such words or expressions, *and, or, or nor* is omitted (b).

(a) It is the centre of *trade, the supreme court of fashion, the umpire of rival talents, and the standard of things rare and precious.*

(b) His trees extended their *cool, umbrageous* branches.

V.

Put a comma between two words or phrases in *apposition* (a) — unless used as a compound name or a single phrase (b) — or in *contrast* (c) with each other. Instead of a comma, a dash [—], alone or combined with other stops, is sometimes used (d).

(a) Above all, I should speak of *Washington, the youthful Virginian Colonel.*

(b) On the seventeenth of November, 1558, after a brief but most disastrous reign, *Queen Mary* died.

(c) While others yet *doubted, they* were resolved; where others *hesitated, they* pressed forward.

(d) *Morgarten — the Thermopylæ of Switzerland — lies* by the little lake of Egeri.

(d) The two principles of which we have hitherto *spoken, — Sacrifice and Truth.*

VI.

Use the comma between two clauses, one of which depends on the other (*a*): omit the comma, however, if the clauses are intimately connected in both sense and construction (*b*).

(*a*) Though herself a model of personal *beauty*, *she* was not the goddess of beauty.

(*a*) Had a conflict once *begun*, the rage of their persecutors would have redoubled.

(*a*) If our will be *ready*, our powers are not deficient.

(*b*) He roused himself from his *reverie* as they approached the side of his bed.

(*b*) The Board may hardly be *reminded* that the power of expending any portion of the principal of our Fund expired at the end of two years.

VII.

Separate from the context *vocative* words or expressions: by one comma, when they occur at the beginning (*a*) or at the end (*b*) of a sentence; by two commas, when they occur in the body of a sentence (*c*).

(*a*) Mark *Antony*, *here*, take you Cæsar's body.

(*b*) What would *you*, *Desdemona*?

(*c*) Mr. Adams and Mr. *Jefferson*, *fellow-citizens*, were successively Presidents of the United States.

(*c*) I remain, *Sir*, your obedient servant.

(*c*) *No*, *Sir*, I thank you.

VIII.

Separate from the context, in like manner, many *adverbs* (*a*), and, usually, *adverbial* (*b*), *participial* (*c*), or *absolute* (*d*) phrases, when they *modify the sentence as a whole* or *connect it with another sentence*.

(*a*) The *pursuers, too, were* close behind.

(*a*) *Finally, let us* not forget the religious character of our origin.

(*b*) The farmers of the neighborhood had made *haste, as soon as the event of the fight was known, to* send hogsheads of their best cider as peace-offerings to the victors.

(*c*) Without attempting a formal definition of the *word, I* am inclined to consider rhetoric, when reduced to a system in books, as a body of rules derived from experience and observation, extending to all communication by language and designed to make it efficient.

(*d*) To make a long story *short, the* company broke up, and returned to the more important concerns of the election.

IX.

Separate from the context, in like manner, those relative clauses which are *explanatory* or *supplementary* merely (*a*); but, generally speaking, not those which are *restrictive* or *determinative* (*b*). (See Campbell's *Rhetoric*, p. 255.)

(*a*) At five in the morning of the seventh, *Grey, who* had wandered from his friends, was seized by two of the Sussex scouts.

(*b*) The uproar, the blood, the gashes, the ghastly *figures which* sank down and never rose again, spread horror and dismay through the town.

(*b*) Those *inhabitants who* had favored the insurrection expected sack and massacre.

X.

Separate *parenthetic* or *intermediate* expressions from the context, by commas (*a*), by dashes alone (*b*) or combined with other stops (*c*), or by parentheses [()] (*d*). The last are less used now than formerly. The dash should not be used too frequently, but is to be preferred to the comma when the use of the latter would cause ambiguity or obscurity, — as when the sentence contains numerous commas (*e*).

Brackets [] are used when words (not the author's) (*f*) or signs (*g*) are inserted in a sentence to explain the meaning or to supply an omission.

(*a*) The difference, therefore, between a regiment of the foot guards and a regiment of clowns just *enrolled*, though doubtless *considerable*, was by no means what it now is.

(*a*) The English of the *North*, or *Northumbrian*, has bequeathed to us few monuments.

(*b*), (*a*) It *will* — I am sure it *will* — *more* and *more*, as time goes on, be found good for this.

(*c*) When he was in a *rage*, — and he very often was in a *rage*, — he swore like a porter.

(*d*) *Circumstances* (*which* with some gentlemen pass for *nothing*) give in reality to every political principle its distinguishing color and discriminating effect.

(*e*), (*a*) In the insurrection of provinces, either distant or separated by natural *boundaries*, — *more* especially if the inhabitants, differing in religion and language, are rather subjects of the same government than portions of the same *people*, — *hostilities* which are waged only to sever a legal tie may assume the *regularity*, and in some measure the *mildness*, of foreign war.

(*f*) The chairman of our Committee of Foreign Relations [*Mr. Eppes*], at the time he introduced these amendments to the House, exhibited the true character of this policy.

(*g*) See brackets enclosing the parenthetic sign in X., line 4.

XI.

The dash, alone or combined with other stops, should be used where the construction or the sense is suddenly changed or suspended (*a*); where a long or significant pause is desired (*b*); where a thought or a word is repeated for emphasis (*c*); in rapid narration (*d*); where an ellipsis occurs of *namely*, *that is*, and the like (*e*), or an omission of words, letters, or figures (*f*); and between a title and the subject-matter (*g*), or the subject-matter and the authority for it (*h*), when both are in the same paragraph.

(*a*) The only consequence will be that the contest, instead of being undertaken while we have strength to support it, will be reserved not for our posterity, but to a time when we ourselves shall have surrendered all our arms to the people with whom we are to *contend* * — *nor* will that period be distant.

(*a*) The man, — it is his system: we do not try a solitary word or act, but his habit.

(*a*) Rome, — what was Rome?

(*a*) To let loose hussars and to bring up artillery, to govern with lighted matches, and to cut, and push, and *prime* — *I* call this, not vigor, but the sloth of cruelty and ignorance.

(*a*) Great honor to the Fire-flies! *But* —! —

(*b*) He thought his whistle was *answered* — *it* was but a blast sweeping sharply through the dry branches.

(*b*) My faithful slave is murdered, and my goods taken for a *prey* — *and Wamba* — *where is Wamba*?

(*b*) “Long, long will I remember your features, and bless God that I leave my noble deliverer united *with*” —

She stopped short.

* Some would put a semicolon before the dash.

(c) I cannot forget that we are men by a more sacred bond than we are *citizens*, — *that* we are children of a common Father more than we are Americans.

(c) What shall become of the *poor*, — *the* increasing Standing Army of the poor?

(d) Hollo! ho! the whole world's *asleep!* — *bring* out the *horses*, — *grease* the *wheels*, — *tie* on the mail; and drive a nail into that *moulding*, — *I'll* not lose a moment.

(e) This deplorable scene admits of but one *addition*, — *that* we are governed by councils from which a reasonable man can expect no remedy but poison, no relief but death.

(f) In the first place, I presume, you will have no difficulty in breaking your word with *Mrs. C* — *y*.

(f) 1874—75.

(g), (h) *Diá-na*. — *The* usual pronunciation is *Di-án-a*. — SMART.

XII.

Beware of using either commas or periods in the place of semicolons [;] and colons [:]. Long sentences broken only by commas are obscure; numerous short sentences separated by periods convey thought vaguely and in fragments: by either extreme, eye and mind are fatigued.

XIII.

Use the semicolon or, very rarely, the colon between *clauses*, each of which is *subdivided by a number of commas* (a).

(a) Death is there associated, not, as in Westminster Abbey and Saint Paul's, with genius and virtue, with public veneration

and with imperishable *renown*; *not*, as in our humblest churches and churchyards, with every thing that is most endearing in social and domestic charities; but with whatever is darkest in human nature and in human destiny.

XIV.

Use the semicolon (*a*) or, less frequently, the colon (*b*) *between two clauses*, of which one is connected with the other by a conjunction, such as *for*, *but*, *and*, or *yet*.

(*a*) See last clause of Example (*a*), XIII.

(*a*) The very idea of purity and disinterestedness in politics falls into disrepute, and is considered as a vision of hot and inexperienced *men*; *and* thus disorders become incurable, not by the virulence of their own quality, but by the unapt and violent nature of their remedies.

(*b*) This scheme was, perhaps, the best that could then be *contrived*: *but* it was completely disconcerted by the course which the civil war took.

(*b*), (*a*) Ayrshire was Cochrane's *object*: *but* the coast of Ayrshire was now guarded by English *frigates*; *and* the adventurers were under the necessity of running up the estuary of the Clyde to Greenock.

In the last example the distinction between the colon and the semicolon is skilfully observed. The connection of thought between the first clause and the second is less close than that between the second and the third; a fact which is indicated by the use of the colon in the first case, and of the semicolon in the second case.

XV.

Where *for*, *but*, *and*, or *yet* is omitted, the colon is usually to be preferred to the semicolon (*a*).

(*a*) The Presbyterians were interdicted from worshipping God anywhere but in private *dwellings*: they were not to presume to build meeting-houses: they were not even to use a barn or an outhouse for religious exercises.

XVI.

Use semicolons between *clauses in a series, having a common dependence* upon a proposition at the beginning or at the end of a sentence (*a*).

(*a*) You could give us no commission to wrong or oppress, or even to suffer any kind of oppression or wrong, on any grounds whatsoever: not on political, as in the affairs of *America*; not on commercial, as in those of *Ireland*; not in civil, as in the laws for *debt*; not in religious, as in the statutes against Protestant or Catholic dissenters.

(*a*) The ground strowed with the dead and the *dying*; the impetuous *charge*; the steady and successful *repulse*; the loud call to repeated *assault*; the summoning of all that is manly to repeated *resistance*; a thousand bosoms freely and fearlessly bared in an instant to whatever of terror there may be in war and death;—all these you have witnessed, but you witness them no more.

(*a*) They forget that, in England, not one shilling of paper-money of any description is received but of *choice*; that the whole has had its origin in cash actually *deposited*; and that it is convertible, at pleasure, in an instant, and without the smallest loss, into cash again.

XVII.

Use colons between two *members* of a sentence, each of which is *composed of* two or more *clauses* separated by *semicolons* (a).

(a) Early reformations are amicable arrangements with a friend in power; late reformations are terms imposed upon a conquered *enemy*: *early* reformations are made in cool blood; late reformations are made under a state of inflammation.

XVIII.

Use semicolons (a) or colons (b) — choosing the one or the other, according as the connection of thought is more or less close — to *connect in form successive short sentences* which are, though but slightly, connected in sense or in construction.

(a) Such was our situation: and such a satisfaction was necessary to prevent recourse to *arms*; it was necessary toward laying them *down*; it will be necessary to prevent the taking them up again and again.

(b) We are seldom tiresome to ourselves; and the act of composition fills and delights the mind with change of language and succession of *images*: *every* couplet when produced is new; and novelty is the great source of pleasure.

(b) The two qualities, however, are by no means *undistinguishable*: a metaphor, for instance, may be apt and striking, and consequently conducive to energy of expression, even though the new image, introduced by it, have no intrinsic beauty.

(b) Very few faults of architecture are mistakes of honest *choice*: *they* are almost all hypocrisies.

XIX.

The colon is used before *particulars formally stated* (a); the colon (b), the comma (c), or the dash (d), before *quotations* indicated by marks of quotation [“ ”]. If the quotation depend directly on a preceding word, no stop is required (e).

(a) So, then, these are the two virtues of *building*: *first*, the signs of man's own good work; *secondly*, the expression of man's delight in work better than his own.

(a) The government possesses three different classes of *powers*: 1st, Those necessary to enable it to accomplish all the declared objects; 2d, Those specially devolved on the nation at large; 3d, Those specially delegated.

(b) Toward the end of your letter, you are pleased to *observe*: “The rejection of a treaty, duly negotiated, is a serious question, to be avoided whenever it can be without too great a sacrifice.”

(c) When the repast was about to commence, the major-domo, or steward, suddenly raising his wand, said *aloud*, “*Forbear!*—Place for the Lady Rowena.”

(d) He went towards William Dane and said, in a voice shaken by *agitation*, —

“The last time I remember using my knife was when I took it out to cut a strap for you.”

(d) The trumpets then again flourished, and a herald, stepping forward, proclaimed *aloud*, — “*Oyez, oyez, oyez.*”

(e) The common people raised the cry of “*Down with the bishops.*”

(e) — their Saxon title of honor, which *signifies* “*Dividers of Bread.*”

(e) You pass one of the much *vaunted* “*villas* on the Brenta.”

(e) It declares *that* “*war exists by the act of Mexico.*”

XX.

At the end of every *complete* sentence put a period [.] , if the sentence affirms or denies ; an interrogation point [?] , if the sentence asks a direct question ; and an exclamation point [!] , if the sentence expresses emotion or wonder. Interrogation or exclamation points are also used in the body of a sentence, when two or more interrogations (*a*) or exclamations (*b*) are closely connected together.

(*a*) For what is a body, but an aggregate of *individuals*? and what new right can be conveyed by a mere change of name?

(*b*) How he could *trot!* how he could run!

XXI.

Periods are used after abbreviations (*a*), after headings and sub-headings (*b*), and before decimals (*c*). In this last case, the period is, in English (and some American) books, put above the line (*d*). Commas are used before every three figures (counted from the right), when there are more than four (*e*), except in dates (*f*).

(*a*) If gold were depreciated one-half, *3l.* would be worth no more than *1l. 10s.* is now.

(*a*) To retain such a lump in such an orbit requires a pull of *1 lb. 6 oz. 51 grs.*

(*b*) *241. Omission of Thou.*

(*c*) This gives 11.93 lbs. of ice-cold water made to boil with 1 lb. of the fuel.

(d) On the system of equal temperament, if C is denoted by 1, E is denoted by 1·25992, and G by 1·49831.

(f), (e) The amount of stock issued by the several States, for each period of five years since 1820, is as follows, viz. :—

From 1820–1825	somewhat over	\$12,000,000.
„ 1825–1830	„ „	13,000,000.
„ 1830–1835	„ „	40,000,000.
„ 1835–1840	„ „	109,000,000.

XXII.

The apostrophe ['] is used to denote the elision of a letter or letters (a), or of a figure or figures (b); and to distinguish the possessive case (c).

(a) 'Tis James of Douglas, by Saint Serle!

(b) Since that time it has been re-observed on every subsequent revolution, in '22, '25, and is always announced in the almanacs as a regular member of our system.

(c) Spenser's adulation of her beauty (at some fifty or sixty years of age) may be extenuated.

(c) The Seven Years' war was carried on in America.

XXIII.

The hyphen [-] is used to join the constituent parts of compound (a) words; and to divide words, as at the end of a line (b). The division at the end of a line should always be by syllables.

(a) The *incense-breathing* morn.

(a) He wears a *broad-brimmed, low-crowned* hat.

(b) See under XIX., in (b) *ques-tion*, in (c) *For-bear*, in (d) *'ep-ping*, in (e) *Di-viders*, and various other words, *supra*.

CAPITAL LETTERS.

I.

Every *sentence opening a paragraph* or *following a period* should begin with a CAPITAL letter.

II.

Every *direct quotation*, formally introduced, should begin with a capital letter (*a*).

(*a*) See (*b*), (*c*), (*d*), under XIX., p. 14.

III.

Capital letters should begin every word which *is, or is used as, a name*. We should write England, not england; the North American Indian, not the north american indian; Shylock, not shylock; the White Star Line, not the white star line; the Bible, not the bible. We should distinguish between the popes and

Pope Pius Ninth ; between the constitution of society and the Constitution of the United States ; between the reformation of a man's character and the Reformation of Luther ; between a revolution in politics and the Revolution of 1688 ; between republican principles and the principles of the Republican party : the foundation of the distinction in each case being that a word, *when used as a name, should begin with a capital letter*. Good authors do not uniformly follow this rule ; but the cause of most departures from it is, probably, to be sought in their own or their printers' inadvertence, rather than in their intention to ignore a useful principle, or to create needless exceptions to it.

IV.

Capital letters exclusively are used in titles of books : they are used more freely in prefaces or introductions than in the body of the work ; and they may be used in order to emphasize words of primary importance. For purposes of emphasis, they should, however, be used with great caution : to insist too frequently upon emphasis is to defeat its object.

V.

Phrases or clauses, when separately numbered, should each begin with a capital letter (*a*).

(*a*) These are usually called —

1. Simple apprehension.
2. Judgment.
3. Reasoning or discourse.

VI.

I and O—not oh—should always be written as capital letters.

