

Week 11, Nov 30: Capital letters, commas, periods, semicolons, quotation marks.

- Capital letters – important in titles (works of art, documents, institutions, etc.)
 - o Rules for writing capital letters vary from field to field
- English uses a larger number of punctuation marks than Czech and each has its purpose

Capitals

33b Capitalize most words in titles and subtitles of works.

Within your text, capitalize all the words in a title *except* the following: articles (*a, an, the*), *to* in infinitives, and connecting words (prepositions and coordinating and subordinating conjunctions) of fewer than five letters. Capitalize even these short words when they are the first or last word in a title or when they fall after a colon or semicolon.

The Sound and the Fury
 "Courtship Through the Ages"
A Diamond Is Forever
 "Knowing Whom to Ask"
Learning from Las Vegas
 "The Truth About AIDS"

Management: A New Theory
 "Once More to the Lake"
An End to Live For
 "Power: How to Get It"
File Under Architecture
Only when I Laugh

Always capitalize the prefix or first word in a hyphenated word within a title. Capitalize the second word only if it is a noun or an adjective or is as important as the first word.

"Applying Stage Make-up"
The Pre-Raphaelites

Through the Looking-Glass

EXERCISE 33.1 Revising: Capitals

Capitalize words as necessary in the following sentences, or substitute small letters for unnecessary capitals. Consult a dictionary if you are in doubt. If the capitalization in a sentence is already correct, mark the number preceding the sentence. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Example:

The first book on the reading list is mark twain's *a connecticut yankee in king arthur's court*.

The first book on the reading list is Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

1. San Antonio, texas, is a thriving city in the southwest.
2. The city has always offered much to tourists interested in the roots of spanish settlement of the new world.
3. The alamo is one of five Catholic Missions built by Priests to convert native americans and to maintain spain's claims in the area.
4. But the alamo is more famous for being the site of an 1836 battle that helped to create the republic of Texas.
5. Many of the nearby Streets, such as Crockett street, are named for men who gave their lives in that Battle.

The Comma

Commas usually function within sentences to separate elements (see the box on the next page). Omitting needed commas or inserting needless ones can confuse the reader:

Comma needed	Though very tall Abraham Lincoln was not an overbearing man.
Revised	Though very tall, Abraham Lincoln was not an overbearing man.
Unneeded commas	The hectic pace of Beirut, broke suddenly into frightening chaos when the city became, the focus of civil war.
Revised	The hectic pace of Beirut, broke suddenly into frightening chaos when the city became, the focus of civil war.

Use a comma before *and*, *but*, or another coordinating conjunction linking main clauses

The coordinating conjunctions are *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*. When these link words or phrases, do not use a comma: *Dugain plays, and sings Irish, and English folk songs*. However, *do* use a comma when a coordinating conjunction joins main clauses. A **main clause** has a subject and a predicate (but no subordinating word at the beginning) and makes a complete statement (see p. 252).

Caffeine can keep coffee drinkers alert, and it may elevate their mood.

Caffeine was once thought to be safe, but now researchers warn of harmful effects.

Coffee drinkers may suffer sleeplessness, for the drug acts as a stimulant to the nervous system.

When main clauses are very short and closely related in meaning, you may omit the comma between them as long as the resulting sentence is clear:

Caffeine helps, but it also hurts.

If you are in doubt about whether to use a comma in such a sentence, use it. It will always be correct.

Combine each group of sentences below into one sentence that contains only two main clauses connected by the coordinating conjunction in parentheses. Separate the main clauses with a comma. You will have to add, delete, and rearrange words. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Example:

The circus had come to town. The children wanted to see it. Their parents wanted to see it. (*and*)

The circus had come to town, and the children and their parents wanted to see it.

1. Parents were once legally required to bestow the father's surname on their children. These laws have been contested in court. They have been found invalid. (*but*)
2. Parents may now give their children any surname they choose. The arguments for bestowing the mother's surname are often strong. They are often convincing. (*and*)
3. Critics sometimes question the effects of unusual surnames on children. They wonder how confusing the new surnames will be. They wonder how fleeting the surnames will be. (*or*)

Use a comma or commas to set off *nonessential* elements

Commas around part of a sentence often signal that the element is not essential to the meaning of the sentence:

Nonessential element

The company, which is located in Oklahoma, has a good reputation.

This **nonessential element** may modify or rename the word it refers to (*company* in the example), but it does not limit the word to a particular individual or group. (Because it does not restrict meaning, a nonessential element is also called a **nonrestrictive element**.) Nonessential elements are *not* essential, but punctuation *is*.

In contrast, an **essential** (or **restrictive**) element *does* limit the word it refers to:

Essential element

The company rewards employees who work hard.

■ Meaning and context

The same element in the same sentence may be essential or nonessential depending on your intended meaning and the context in which the sentence appears. For example, look at the second sentence in each of the following passages:

Essential

Not all the bands were equally well received, however. The band, playing old music, held the audience's attention. The other groups created much less excitement. [*Playing old music* identifies a particular band.]

Nonessential

A new band called Fats made its debut on Saturday night. The band, playing old music, held the audience's attention. If this performance is typical, the group has a bright future. [*Playing old music* adds information about a band already named.]

Insert commas in the following sentences to set off nonessential elements, and delete any commas that incorrectly set off essential elements. If a sentence is correct as given, mark the number preceding it.

Example:

Our language has adopted the words, *garage* and *fanfare*, from the French.

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1. Italians insist that Marco Polo the thirteenth-century explorer did not import pasta from China.
2. Pasta which consists of flour and water and often egg existed in Italy long before Marco Polo left for his travels.
3. A historian who studied pasta says that it originated in the Middle East in the fifth century.
4. Most Italians dispute this account although their evidence is shaky.

Combine each pair of sentences below into one sentence that uses the element described in parentheses. Insert commas as appropriate. You will have to add, delete, change, and rearrange words. Some items have more than one possible answer. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Example:

Mr. Ward's oldest sister helped keep him alive. She was a nurse in the hospital. (*Nonessential clause beginning who.*)

Mr. Ward's oldest sister, who was a nurse in the hospital, helped keep him alive.

1. American colonists first imported pasta from the English. The English had discovered it as tourists in Italy. (*Nonessential clause beginning who.*)
2. The English returned from their grand tours of Italy. They were called macaronis because of their fancy airs. (*Essential phrase beginning returning.*)
3. A hair style was also called macaroni. It had elaborate curls. (*Essential phrase beginning with.*)
4. The song "Yankee Doodle" refers to this hairdo. It reports that Yankee Doodle "stuck a feather in his cap and called it macaroni." (*Essential clause beginning when.*)
5. The song was actually intended to poke fun at unrefined American colonists. It was a creation of the English. (*Nonessential appositive beginning a creation.*)

Use commas to prevent misreading

Confusing Soon after the business closed its doors.

Clear Soon after, the business closed its doors.

Faulty A historian who studied pasta, places its origin in the Middle East.

Revised A historian who studied pasta says that it originated in the Middle East.

Semicolon

(Adapted from Maimon, Elaine P. and Janice H. Peritz . *A Writer's Resource: A Handbook for Writing and Research*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003.)

The drug does little to relieve symptoms, and it can have side effects.

The side effects are not minor; some leave the patient quite ill.

(**wrong:** The side effects are not minor, some leave the patient quite ill)

Comma separates both equal and unequal sentence elements:

- An airline once tried to boost sales by advertising the tense alertness of its crews, but nervous fliers did not want to hear about pilots' sweaty palms.
- Although the airline campaign failed, many advertising agencies, including some clever ones, copied its underlying message.

Semicolon chiefly separates equal and balanced sentence elements.

- The airline campaign had highlighted only half the story; the other half was buried in the copy.
- The campaign should not have stressed the pilots' insecurity; instead, the campaign should have stressed the improved performance resulting from that insecurity.

Exercise: Combine each set of three sentences below into one sentence with two main clauses using a semicolon. Make any changes that you feel are necessary.

- 1) The painter Andrew Wyeth is widely admired. He is not universally admired. Some critics view his work as sentimental.
- 2) Jazz and rock change rapidly. They nourish experimentation. They nourish improvisation.
- 3) Contemporary classical music not only can draw on tradition. It also can respond to innovations. These are innovations such as jazz rhythms and electronic sounds.

Is also used with *however*, *for example*, and other **transitional expressions**.

- An American immigrant, Levi Strauss, invented blue jeans in the 1860s; eventually, his product clothed working men throughout the West.
- Blue jeans have become fashionable all over the world; (however,) the American originators (,however,) still wear more jeans than anyone else.

Exercise: Insert a semicolon in each of the following sentences. Also use commas where needed.

- 1) He knew that tickets for the concert would be scarce therefore he arrived at the box office hours before it opened.
- 2) Music is a form of communication like language the basic elements however are not letters but notes.
- 3) Computers can process any information that can be represented numerically as a result they can process musical information.
- 4) A computer's ability to process music depends on what software it can run it must moreover be connected to a system that converts electrical vibration into sound.

Punctuation exercise: *Discuss the following sentences with your partner and decide which are punctuated correctly.*

- a) The dog wanted to play, it was very lonely.
- b) The dog wanted to play; it was very lonely.
- c) The dog wanted to play: it was very lonely.
- d) Because it was very lonely, the dog wanted to play.
- e) The dog wanted to play because it was very lonely.
- f) The dog wanted to play: fetch, cards , and video games.
- g) The dog wanted to play; fetch, cards, and video games.
- h) The dog wiggled its tail after playing fetch; it felt happy and licked its owner's cheek.
- i) Cars usually accelerate faster, but trucks have larger momentum.
- j) Cars usually accelerate faster: but trucks have larger momentum.
- k) Cars usually accelerate faster; trucks have larger momentum.
- l) Cars usually accelerate faster, trucks have larger momentum.
- m) There are two reasons for the protests, the corruption of public officials and large unemployment.
- n) There are two reasons for the protests; the corruption of public officials and large unemployment.
- o) There are two reasons for the protests: the corruption of public officials and large unemployment.
- p) We wanted to buy some nice posters for our lab; unfortunately, they were out of all Krteček posters.
- q) We wanted to buy some nice posters for our lab, unfortunately, they were out of all Krteček posters.