

Commas, periods, semicolons, quotation marks.

- English uses a larger number of punctuation marks than Czech and each has its purpose

The Comma

- Usually within sentences to separate elements.
- Omitting needed commas or inserting needless ones can confuse the reader:

Comma needed: 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.

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

- Coordinating conjunctions: *for*, *and*, *not*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so* (FANBOYS)
- When these link words or phrases, do not use a comma; however, **use** a comma when a coordinating conjunction joins main clauses.
- When main clauses are very short, you may omit the comma.

Exercise: 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 may have to add, delete, and rearrange words.

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

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

These parts are not essential to the meaning of the sentence; nonessential elements are **not** essential, but punctuation **is**.

Contrast with the following **essential** element:

The company rewards employees who work hard.

Using a comma here would significantly change the meaning. Depending on your intended meaning and the context of the sentence, you may have to think whether to use a comma or not. Compare the following:

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.

- ➔ Here the phrase *playing old music* helps us identify the particular band, therefore it is *essential* to the meaning of the sentence.

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.

- ➔ Here the band is identified clearly enough in the main clause; the phrase *playing old music* then adds additional information and is *nonessential*.

Exercise: Insert commas in the following sentences to set off nonessential elements, and delete any commas that incorrectly set off essential elements. Some sentences may be correct.

Example:

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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.

Exercise: 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.

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 clause beginning **a creation**.)

Use commas to prevent misreading

Soon after the business closed its doors. VS Soon after, the business closed its doors.

A historian, who studied pasta, places its origin in the Middle East. VS. A historian who studied pasta says that it originated in the Middle East.

Semicolon

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.