

Punctuation Rules

A Semicolons

1. Semicolons are used to separate two independent clauses from one another in a sentence. (For the purposes of the ACT, think of a semicolon as being the same as a period.)

Example: As the sun sank gloomily behind a cloud, Tom peered up into the sky; he knew a storm was on the horizon.

B Colon

1. A colon is used before a list in a sentence when the list is preceded by a complete sentence.

Example: There are many foods I consider to be in my top list of favorites: steak, sushi, mashed potatoes, and pizza.

2. A colon is used for an extra explanation in a sentence when the explanation is preceded by a complete sentence.

Example: Stephanie heard a crash and when she looked up to see what it was she gasped: a burglar was standing in her doorway.

Important: What comes before the colon MUST be a complete sentence in order to use a colon.

C Hyphen

1. A hyphen is used before an extra explanation.(just like a colon, you can use either)

Example: Stephanie heard a crash and when she looked up to see what it was she gasped-a burglar was standing in her doorway.

2. A hyphen can be used for a contrast.

Example: I like steak-not soup.

3. A hyphen is used to separate a parenthetical element in the middle of a sentence (can use a comma for this as well)

Example: Parenthetical elements-although sometimes quite useful-are not a necessary part of a sentence.

D Apostrophes

1. Apostrophes are used to show possession.
2. For singular possession (one person or thing possessing something) just add 's

Example: boy's hat

3. For plural possession (two or more people or things owning something) make the word plural first. Then if it ends in s add an apostrophe, it doesn't add 's.

Example: girls' shoes geese's feathers

E Commas

1. Use them to separate items in a list of 3 or more.

Example: Please go to the store and pick up eggs, cheese, and milk.

2. Use them to separate a parenthetical element from the rest of the sentence.

Example: The man, exhausted from a hard day's work, went home to go straight to bed.

3. When a sentence starts with a dependent clause followed by an independent clause, use a comma to separate the two clauses.

Example: If I get a good night's rest, I will ace the ACT.

4. Use a comma to separate two adjectives when you put the word and between them or you could change the order of them.

Example: The old, grumpy man lounged in his armchair.

5. If a sentence begins with a prepositional phrase or intro words, put a comma after it.

Example: At the end of the day, Judy was glad she studied for the ACT.

6. Use a comma plus a coordinating conjunction to separate two independent clauses.

Example: I know I have two complete sentences, so I need to punctuate accordingly.

7. Use a comma to separate a name or title.

Example My brother, Joe, is a really nice guy.

Note: It is also acceptable to use no commas here. There is technically a distinction here for when you put the commas for a title and when you don't, but all you need to know for the ACT is you either put the two commas to separate the name or you put no commas.