QUICK GUIDE TO PUNCTUATION

The English punctuation system only consists of a few common marks on the page: the period, comma, semicolon, colon, apostrophe, hyphen (-), dash (–), question mark, and exclamation point. Besides these common marks, writers more rarely use parentheses ( ), ellipses (. . .), brackets [ ], italics (underlining), quotation marks, and capital letters. If you think of these marks as a system primarily indicating complete sentences and key sentence parts, you will be able to eliminate almost all punctuation errors from your own writing. Then you can use a book like <u>A Writer's Reference</u> to look up exceptions.

Punctuating Complete Sentences

You must have a subject, verb, and object (or its equivalent) to have a complete sentence, a main or independent clause. You can link main clauses (SVO units) (and avoid X) as follows:

SVO. SVO.
SVO, and SVO. (Coordinating conjunction after a comma)
SVO; SVO. (Semicolon links two related sentences of equal importance)
SVO: SVO. (Colon leans forward into the second sentence)
SVO because SVO. (Subordinating conjunction beginning a subordinate or dependent clause)

X   S. VO. (Fragment)
X   SVO SVO. (Run-on or fused sentence)
X   SVO, SVO. (Comma fault or comma splice)

Other Use for the Semicolon: in a series with internal commas
Other Use for the Colon: after a complete sentence and before a list

Most Punctuation with Commas

Use a comma for the following structures:
       Introductory phrase or clause, main SVO.
       S, phrase renaming the subject (appositive), VO.
       SVO, explanatory phrase or clause.

Do not use a comma for the following structures:
       X   S, V, O. (No single commas are allowed between main sentence elements)
       X   S, phrase necessary to identify the subject, VO. (Restrictive phrase or clause)
       X   SVO, phrase necessary to identify the object.

Other Punctuation Marks

apostrophe: shows possession and contraction
hyphen: shows parts of words or phrases that function as a unit
dash: shows interruptions or emphatic phrases
parentheses: show interruptions or in-text citations
ellipses: show words left out or time passing
brackets: show insertions or parentheses inside parentheses
italics: show titles of large works, words used <u>as</u> words, emphasis
capital letters: show first word of a sentence or proper nouns
quotation marks: show direct quotations and titles of small works
single quotation marks: show a quotation within a quotation