

# GENERAL INFORMATION ON PUNCTUATION

To some extent, punctuation is a matter of style; however, too much punctuation can make your writing seem rough and jagged, and too little punctuation can make you sound out-of-breath and rushed.

Here are some general punctuation guidelines and rules:

1. **Put commas after any introductory phrases (long clauses that begin the sentence).**

On the other hand, the voters did finally go to the polls.  
After going to a lot of trouble, the voters found out the candidates' positions.

2. **Do not punctuate relative clauses (those clauses that begin with who, which, that, etc.) because they contain information necessary to the meaning of the sentence.**

Eighteen-year-olds who are intelligent and well-dressed should be allowed to vote. (This statement applies only to some 18 year olds.)

**Punctuate relative clauses that are not necessary to the meaning of the sentence but instead simply add extra information.**

Eighteen year olds, who are intelligent and well-dressed, should be allowed to vote. (This sentence applies to all 18 year olds. Their intelligence and ways of dress do not affect their right to vote, in this sentence.)

3. **Separate independent clauses with a comma. These clauses are joined by and or but, and either clause could stand by itself.**

The voters are prepared to go to the polls, and the newscasters are prepared to tell them who to vote for.

**Sometimes you can leave out the and or but to substitute a semicolon.**

The voters are prepared to go to the polls; the newscasters are prepared to tell them who to vote for.

**If any clause has any commas of its own, separate the clauses with a semicolon.**

The voters, who have a hard time knowing about the candidates, are prepared to go to the polls; and the newscasters are prepared to tell them who to vote for.

5. **If the subject comes next to the verb, do not separate them with a comma.**

Wrong: As we go to press this week, the voters, are preparing to go to the polls.

## **Punctuation Exercise**

Punctuate the following directive.

Dean Jewell Friend has recently communicated to me her concern over the number of Change of Grades which her office is called upon to process. Apparently this department is a major offender so we should all exercise greater care in filling out grade sheets.

A particular problem lies with the ABS grade it is given to those students who simply disappear from class and fail to process an official withdrawal because it is computed as an "E" for GPA purposes. Students frequently ask instructors for an "INC" after the grade has been given; this should not be done despite whatever tales of woe and personal misfortune students may present if the grade has been justly awarded it should not be changed.

One way of reducing requests for grade changes is to inform your students of this policy. Let them know that they may withdraw from a course without a grade any time before the end of the fifth week of classes; after that a "W/P" or "W/E" will be given if they officially withdraw. If they fail to attend class and do not process a withdrawal through the registrar's office the "ABS" is the only grade you can give. Many students believe that instructors can give a "W" grade; explain that this is not true so that if they decide to stop attending a class for any reason whatsoever it is their responsibility to process an official withdrawal.

## **Try this one, from James Baldwin's NOBODY KNOWS MY NAME**

That the tensions of American life, as well as the possibilities are tremendous is certainly not even a question but these are dealt with in contemporary literature mainly compulsively that in the book is more likely to be a symptom of our tension than an examination of it. The time has come God knows for us to examine ourselves but we can only do it if we are willing to free ourselves of the myth of America and try to find out what is really happening here.

Every society is really governed by hidden laws by unspoken but profound assumptions on the part of the people and ours is no exception it is up to the American writer to find out what these laws and assumptions are in a society much given to smashing taboos without thereby managing to be liberated from them it will be no easy matter.

.....In this endeavor to wed the vision of the Old World with that of the New it is the writer not the statesman who is our strongest arm though we do not wholly believe it yet the interior life is a real life and the intangible dreams of people have a tangible effect on the world.