A Simple Guide to Punctuation

Six Common Problems in an Sentence

1. Is the sentence complete?

- Is there a subject?
- Is there a verb?
- What if there's more than one verb?

2. Are any words missing, or are any words inadvertently repeated?

Read the sentence out loud to help spot missing or extraneous words.

3. Is the sentence punctuated correctly?

4. Are verbs used correctly?

- Does each verb agree with its subject?
- Does the verb tense correctly express when the action takes place (past, present, future, etc.)?

5. Are pronouns used correctly?

- What noun phrase does the pronoun represent? How close together are they? Are there any other noun phrases in between the two?
- Do the pronoun and the noun it refers to agree? (Are they both plural or both singular?)

6. Is everything spelled correctly?

- Run a spell check.
- Remember to check for commonly confused words that computer spell-checkers miss (it/it's, their/there, etc.). Also, keep in mind that computers often don't "know" technical terms and recently invented words, so you'll have to check those yourself.

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Comma

- •separates information into readable units
- •vital in longer sentences

Apostrophe

- contractions used to show that something has been left out, and where it has been left out
- possessives indicates ownership with nouns (btwn noun and s) and with more than one individual (put at end of the word)

Colon

- •indicates that a list, quotation or summary is about to follow
- •separates an initial sentence/clause from a second clause, list, phrase or quotation

Semicolon

- •separates two complete sentences that are, however, closely linked
- •serves as a second level of puncuation in a series of words of phrases which already have commas making some divisions

Period

- •mark the end of a sentence
- •to indicate abbreviated words
- •to punctuate numbers and dates

Question Mark

•used at the end of a sentence which is a question

Exclamation Mark

- •used at the end of a sentence and indicates surprise, anger, or alarm
- •should be used sparingly and are not often used in academic writing