Commas indicate **direct quoted speech**: 

- He said, “Let’s go,” and we did.
- He said we should go, and we did.

Commas set off **transitional phrases**:

- As a matter of fact, American football was derived from rugby.
- Many people, however, are allergic to cats

Commas go inside **quotation marks**:

- He had heard about “oleo,” but she didn’t know what it was.

Commas come before **coordinating conjunctions** (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) when they link two independent clauses:

- It was raining, and I was hurrying to get home.
- She felt terrible, but she went to class anyway.

Commas follow **introductory adverb clauses** and **introductory phrases**:

- On the way home, I stopped to buy groceries.
- Because it was raining, I took a taxi home.
- To our surprise, they were brothers.

Commas separate **items in a series**, including **coordinate adjectives**:

- He bought bananas, apples, oranges, and cheese.
- She had long, dark, straight, thick hair.
Semicolons connect two independent clauses:

The book is informative; it has helpful charts and graphs.
My brother is going to Spain for the summer; he will be studying Spanish.

Semicolons separate three or more items in a series that already have commas in them:

I like big, purple shirts; red, high-heeled shoes; and fluffy, yellow pillows.
I live with Larry, a student; Moe, an executive; and Curly, a cop.

Colons come after independent clauses that introduce a related idea or ideas:

I have two favorite colors: red and purple.

Colons go outside quotation marks:

He explained “oleo”: it’s a non-dairy butter substitute.

Dashes indicate added emphasis, change of thought, or interruption

Added emphasis:
Bob might go home - you never know.

Change of thought:
I saw her go - oh, never mind.

Interruption:
I go to work – he does nothing.

Words between dashes are generally not part of the subject

Mary - and her little lamb - was always here.