

Center for Academic Learning (CAL)
2nd Floor Gurley Hall 2205/2210
<http://www.gallup.unm.edu/cal>
<http://fb.me/UNMGCAL>
Mon-Fri, 8:00am-5:00pm



Commas, Semicolons, Colons, and Dashes

Commas indicate **direct quoted speech**:

He said, "Let's go," and we did.

He said we should go, and we did.

Commas go inside **quotation marks**:

He had heard about "oleo," but she didn't know what it was.

Commas set off **transitional phrases**:

As a matter of fact, American football was derived from rugby.

Many people, however, are allergic to cats

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.

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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.