Section 10: Punctuation Format and Abbreviations

10.1 Parentheses

Parentheses, em dashes, and commas serve similar purposes but differ in one important respect: parentheses can set off only nonessential elements, but em dashes can set off both essential and nonessential elements. Em dashes represent the most forceful type of interruption, and commas the least.

The text within parentheses must be grammatically independent of the sentence carrying it, and can be a word, a phrase, an entire sentence, a number or an abbreviation.

For parenthetical items falling within a sentence, punctuation falls outside the closing parenthesis.

> Use: For Jane there is only one goal (and you know it): getting that MBA.

Do not use a period before the closing parenthesis except with an abbreviation.

> Use: She prepared all the Thanksgiving dishes (turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes, etc.).

10.2 Square Brackets

The term *brackets* is often used for square brackets [ ], but can also be applied to

- parentheses, or round brackets ( ),
- the bracket pair, often called braces or curly brackets { }, and
- angle brackets < >.

Hence the term *square bracket*s is preferred. Square brackets are used in the following instances:

1. To distinguish text or letters added (by someone other than the original writer) to quoted text to clarify the original text,

   > Use: Cushing commented, "When Osler moved [to Baltimore], he was not risking his future."

2. To separate an editorial comment,

   > Use: His diary included this note: "When I was in London I briefly met Darwynne [sic], that horrible chap who claims we are descended from monkeys."

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The notation [sic] is from the Latin for *thus*, and is used to tell the reader that the mistake was in the original quoted text. The use of [sic] presumes that the reader knows the correct form. Latin abbreviations accepted as common terms are not italicized. A more helpful notation is a correction of the error, enclosed in square brackets like [sic].

3. To enclose a parenthetic statement within a parenthetic statement enclosed by parentheses.

Use: The vaccination was given (according to current [2009] recommendations).

10.3 Braces and Angle Brackets

Braces ({}), also called curly brackets, are used in programming languages and mathematical and other specialized writing, and are not interchangeable with parentheses or brackets.

Angle brackets are used in electronic manuscript preparation to code instructions to a typesetter. They look similar to the mathematical signs for *less than* (<) and *greater than* (>), but should not be confused with them. Angle brackets should not be used to set off URLs and e-mail addresses, as they have specific meaning within some markup languages (including html).

10.4 Comma, Semicolon, and Colon Use in a Series

a. Comma use in a series

When independent clauses are joined by *and*, *but*, *or*, *so*, *yet*, or any other conjunction, a comma usually precedes the conjunction. If the clauses are very short and closely connected, the comma may be omitted if it will not cause ambiguity. If the last element is one of a pair joined by *and*, the pair should still be preceded by a serial comma and the first *and*.

Use: The client, the lawyer, and the accountant were exiting the meeting. [comma precedes conjunction]

We cannot fly home until after the meeting, but we could leave first thing in the morning. [comma precedes conjunction]

We finished the map and Acme printed it. [comma not needed, short clauses]

The meal consisted of soup, salad, and macaroni and cheese. [last element is one of a pair joined by *and*]

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In a series of elements joined by conjunctions, no commas are needed unless the elements are long.

Use: Is the book by Smith or Jones or Johnson?
You can turn right at the stop light and left when you reach the library, or left at the coffee shop up the street.

When a dependent clause precedes an independent clause, separate the clauses with a comma (Gregg 2005). The words *after*, *although*, *as*, *because*, *before*, *if*, *since*, *unless*, *when,* and *while* are among the words most frequently used to introduce dependent clauses.

Use: Before we make a decision, we must have all the facts. [comma after introductory dependent clause]

    When the sonar estimates are in, we can make a decision about the fishery. [comma after introductory dependent clause]

When a dependent clause follows the main clause, it should not be preceded by a comma if it is restrictive (essential to the meaning).

Use: We must have all the facts before we make a decision. [dependent clause follows independent clause]

b. Semicolon use in a series

When elements in a series have their own internal punctuation, or when they are very long and complex, they should be separated by semicolons.

Use: Our company will be represented by Mary Jones, Director of Finance; Mark Smith, President; Joe Johnson, Vice President; and Anne Wilson, Marketing Director.

    Alaska villages currently conducting subsistence hunts of Western Arctic bowhead whales include Gambell, Savoonga, Little Diomede, and Wales (located along the coast of the Bering Sea); Kivalina, Pt. Hope, Wainwright, and Barrow (along the coast of the Chukchi Sea); and Nuiqsut and Kaktovik (on the coast of the Beaufort Sea).

Use a semicolon to separate two closely related independent clauses in one sentence with no conjunction.

Use: Their vision is reported to be well developed; they appear to have acute vision both in and out of water.

If you can use a period after the first main clause, and begin a new sentence with the second clause, you can use a semicolon. Also, the following transition words and phrases can be used with semicolons if the writer needs to indicate or clarify the relationship between the thoughts before and after the semicolon: *accordingly*, *consequently*, *for example*, *for instance*, *further*, *furthermore*, *however*, *indeed*, *moreover*, *nevertheless*, *nonetheless*, *on the contrary*, *on the other hand*, *therefore*, and *thus*.

Use: We use aircraft geometry to generate survivability parameters such as radar signature; furthermore, we add performance, weapons, and avionics characteristics from the developed aircraft design to evaluate military effectiveness.

c. Colon use in a series

Use a colon after a formal statement to mean *note what follows,* or between independent clauses in cases where the second clause explains the first.

Use: A citizen has one major responsibility: to vote.
    Our objective was clear: we had to win.

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A vertical list is best introduced by a complete grammatical sentence, followed by a colon. The words *as follows*, *this*, *these*, and *thus* are often used to introduce a list. Do not put a colon after a verb or preposition.

Use: The catch was estimated using various methods:
       1) a statewide harvest survey
       2) a statewide charter logbook
       3) a creel survey

Avoid: Field technicians are going to:
       1) count fish eggs
       2) weigh the eggs and record the data
       3) take photos for the report

Avoid: Methods for the catch estimation are:
       1) a statewide harvest survey
       2) a statewide charter logbook
       3) a creel survey

List items are not punctuated unless they are complete sentences.

Use: The proper procedure is this:
       1) Read the lesson first.
       2) Study each item.
       3) Study the lesson as a whole.

In a numbered vertical list that completes an introductory sentence, each list item begins with a lowercase letter. Usually this type of list is run into the text; the vertical format should only be used if the items need to be highlighted.

In the following examples, *The herring sac roe fisheries may open contingent upon* is not a complete statement, so there is no need for a colon or semicolon after the word *upon*.

Use: The herring sac roe fisheries may open contingent upon 1) the industry notifying the department of interest in harvesting herring from a specific area, 2) the department documenting herring biomass, and 3) the department establishing a guideline harvest level.

Use: The herring sac roe fisheries may open contingent upon
       1) industry interest in harvesting herring from a specific area,
       2) the department documenting herring biomass, and
       3) the department establishing a guideline harvest level.

Avoid: The herring sac roe fisheries may open contingent upon:
       1) industry interest in harvesting herring from a specific area
       2) the department documenting herring biomass
       3) the department establishing a guideline harvest level

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When the list items have their own internal commas, semicolons may be used between the items, and a period should follow the final item (see Semicolon use in a series, 10.4b).

10.5   Dashes and Hyphens

Dashes and hyphens have different appearances and uses. For hyphen use in compound words see Section 4 Compound Words, or Section 4.3 Hyphenating Nouns and Adjectives.

a. En dash

The en dash is width of the uppercase letter *N*. It is used most often for connecting numbers (See Section 8.6 Ranges). An en dash is used instead of a hyphen when one element of a compound adjective is an open (two words, not hyphenated) compound or if two or more of its elements are open compounds or are hyphenated.

Use: a hospital–nursing home connection [*nursing home* is an open compound]
           a nursing home–home care policy [both elements are open compounds]
           a quasi-public–quasi-judicial body [two elements hyphenated]

An en dash can also be used to link a city name to the name of a university that has multiple campuses.

Use: the University of Alaska Southeast–Juneau

b. Em dash

An em dash is the width of the uppercase letter *M*. It sets aside text that interrupts a sentence. The content set off within a sentence often requires two em dashes, and grammatical rules require that no more than two be used within a sentence. If it is necessary to set off additional points within that sentence, parentheses must be used. The function of the em dash is similar to that of parentheses or commas, but the em dash is the most forceful, and the comma the least forceful.

In place of commas: When a nonessential sentence element needs special emphasis, use em dashes instead of commas. This element can define, elaborate on, emphasize, explain, or summarize, and will usually be a sharp break and not the central message in the sentence. If the element itself contains commas, use em dashes to set it off.

Use: At the annual banquet, the speakers—and the food—were superb.
           Four areas—Icy Strait, Thomas Bay, Glacier Bay, and Seymour Canal—produced over 50% of 2006 commercial harvest.
           We offer the best service in town—and the fastest!

In place of parenthesis: Using em dashes to set off parenthetical information gives stronger emphasis to the sentence element.

Use: Chinook salmon—but not pink salmon—would be vulnerable at this life stage.

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In place of a colon or semicolon: Using an em dash in place of a colon or semicolon signals a stronger but less formal break. As with a colon, the em dash introduces explanatory words, phrases or clauses.

Use: I will need several items for the meeting today—a copy of the June 12 letter, the contract, and yesterday's e-mail correspondence.

Ages are designated according to the European system—an age-1.3 fish has one freshwater annulus and 3 ocean annuli.

This stands in stark contrast to the average annual harvest of 41 million fish during the 1950s—the final decade under federal management of the state's commercial salmon fisheries.

When used in place of a semicolon, the em dash separates two closely related independent clauses.

Use: I do the work—he gets the credit!
Wilson is not qualified for the promotion—he is not an efficient manager.

10.6 Slash Marks

The forward slash should be used as a symbol for the mathematical operation of division and for other specialized uses, including the expression of rate or concentrations, e.g., 5 m/s or 20 mol/L. It should not be used in place of a comma, en dash, hyphen, or full expression.

Use: The school opened a hematology–oncology unit.
Avoid: The school opened a hematology/oncology unit.

10.7 Quotation Marks

Quotations marks should be used for the following purposes.

1. For short direct quotations (longer, extended quotations of more than two or three lines should be set apart by indentation and the use of a different font).

2. To identify hypothetical quotations.

Use: Perhaps you should have said something like, "not all of the fish successfully homed to the release site."

3. Within the main body of text to identify the titles of articles or book chapters not formally cited with a scientific paper format.

a. Period inside quotes

Periods and commas precede closing quotation marks, whether double or single. An apostrophe at the end of a word should never be confused with a closing single quotation mark; punctuation always follows the apostrophe.

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b. Quotes within quotes

Quoted words, phrases, and sentences that run into the text are enclosed in double quotation marks. Single quotation marks enclose quotations within quotations; double marks, quotations within these, and so on.

Use: "To say that 'I mean what I say' is the same as 'I say what I mean' is to be as confused as Alice at the Mad Hatter's tea party."

Imagine Bart's surprise, dear reader, when Emma turned to him and said, "What 'promise'?"

c. Punctuation outside quotations

Colons, semicolons, question marks, and exclamation points all follow closing quotation marks unless a question mark or exclamation point belongs within the quoted matter.

Use: I was asked for my "name and serial number"; I have no serial number.
Which of Shakespeare's characters said, "All the world's a stage"?
"Where are you?"
"Watch out!"

10.8   Abbreviations

Abbreviations should be avoided in running text except for those that are widely used in the particular context of the document. However, some commonly used abbreviations are not always appropriate in running text; for example, avoid lowercase abbreviations at the start of a sentence and do not use symbols for units of measure if not preceded by a number.

Use: Observations began at 12:01 a.m. and lasted 3 d.
We observed morning changes [not AM changes] in diet each day [not each d].
We isolated mtDNA.

Avoid: mtDNA was isolated.

Spell out months in running text even when they are parenthetical.

Use: The same methods were used to capture and mark fish in the two lakes in May–June 2001 and again in October–November 2001, except that clove oil was used during these sampling periods.

Avoid: We continued the studies in 2002 (May–Jun, Oct–Nov) again applying clove oil as an anesthetic.

10.9   Social Titles, Academic Degrees, and Abbreviated Designations

Social titles (such as *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, and *Dr.*) in both general style and modern scientific style are always abbreviated and followed by a period. In almost all constructions,

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the social title can be omitted with no loss of respect.

Use: We appreciate the technical support provided by Mr. Jason Guild.
       We appreciate the technical support provided by Jason Guild.

Academic degrees and professional designations are always followed by a comma when they follow a personal name. The social title is always omitted when the academic degree follows a name.

Use: It is my pleasure to introduce Robin Smith, Ph.D., and Mary Jones, RN, MS.
       It is my pleasure to introduce Dr. Robin Smith and Ms. Mary Jones.

a. General style

Abbreviations *Jr.* and *Sr.* are punctuated.

Use: Dexter Harrison III was appointed.
       Dexter Harrison Jr. was the designee.

b. Modern scientific style

Abbreviations *Jr* and *Sr* are not punctuated, except in bibliographic references. Abbreviated designations for *Junior* (*Jr*), *Senior* (*Sr*), *the Second* (*II* or *2nd*), and *the Third* (*III* or *3rd*) are part of the person's name; therefore, place them immediately after the name without a comma. A designation of this type precedes any academic degrees or professional designations. Use such designation only with the full personal name (given names and family name) and in bibliographic references.

Use: Dr. James Kelly Jr   Dexter Harrison III, MD   Patrick Elliot II MD Ph.D.
       Quinn II, T. J., A. L. Johnson Jr, W. R. Thomson III, and R. T. Jones.
       The trees are threatened by insects (Harrison, D., Jr. 1999).
Avoid: Dr. Kelly Jr

10.10 Italics

Italics should be used for the following purposes:

1. To designate document titles presented within the body of the text, except in literature cited sections, where titles should follow the specified format

2. The names of ships, aircraft, trains, etc.

   Use: R/V *Medeia*

3. To refer to a word or phrase as a word or to identify a word that will be defined (often introduced by the expression *the word*, or *the term*)

   Use: the term *anchor tag* refers to a uniquely numbered Floy t-bar tag

4. For Latin and other foreign words, including Latin binomials for species

names, except for those Latin and foreign words that are common to the reader, such as vice versa or persona non grata

Use: Sockeye salmon *Oncorhynchus nerka* and pink salmon *O. gorbuscha* were negligible components of the sport harvest.

5. To identify jargon or special terms of art that can be confused with words that have a different meaning in everyday speech

Use: ADF&G recommends removing the *stock of concern* designation from the Hugh Smith stock. [specific technical and legal meaning]

6. For the names of variables, including variables that are parts of the names of statistical tests and distributions

Use: *t*-test   *F*-statistic χ^2-distribution

7. For occasional emphasis

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