

Writing Guidelines for Howard Services

Punctuation and Quotation Marks.

Commas and periods go *inside* quotation marks, while semicolons and colons go *outside*, regardless of the punctuation in the original quotation. Question marks and exclamation points depend on whether the question or exclamation is part of the quotation, or part of the sentence containing the quotation. Some examples:

- See the chapter entitled "The Conclusion, in which Nothing is Concluded." (Periods always go inside.)
- The spokesman called it "shocking," and called immediately for a committee. (Commas always go inside.)
- Have you read "The DaVinci Code"? (The question mark is part of the outer sentence, not the quoted part, so it goes outside.)
- He asked, "How are you?" (The question mark is part of the quoted material, so it goes inside.)
- Further punctuation around quoted speech or phrases depends on how it fits into the rest of your text. If a quoted word or phrase fits into the flow of your sentence without a break or pause, then a comma may not be necessary:

The phrase "lovely, dark and deep" begins to suggest ominous overtones.

Following a form of *to say*, however, you'll always need a comma:
My father always said, "Be careful what you wish for."

"I don't care," she said, "what you think about it."

Be careful, though, to begin a new sentence after the attribution if sense calls for it:
"I don't care," she said. "What do you think?"

Commas.

- Commas **SHOULD** be used before the conjunction *and*, *but*, and *or* if there is an independent clause (a complete sentence) on both sides of it. Examples:
She wanted to buy a new car, but she didn't have enough money to do so.
The wind blew fiercely, and the rain poured down.
Alaska was not the last state admitted into the US, nor does it have the lowest total population.
- Commas should **NOT** be used after the conjunctions *and*, *but*, and *or*, unless the comma sets off a phrase which can't stand alone as a sentence. It's wrong to write "But, she did get it done on time." Use the comma only if there's such a phrase, as in, "But, *to be fair*, she did get it done on time."
- Commas should **NOT** be used between a month and year in a date: not *November, 1990*, but *November 1990*. The comma stops two sets of numerals from running into one another. It **SHOULD** be used in *November 20, 1990*.
- Some style guides call for omitting the comma after very short prepositional phrases at the beginning of a sentence: **NOT** "On Saturday, the office is closed," but "On Saturday the office is closed." But **DO** use a comma after long prepositional phrases or dependent clauses: "*Because the entire epic is concerned with justifying the ways of God to man*, Milton must present free will in a positive light." (It's often a judgment call whether a phrase is long or short.)

Frequently Misused Words:

Ring, Rang, Rung. It boils down to this: You *ring* it up now, today, presently. You *rang* it up previously, in the past. You have rung it up many times, and you had rung it up many times.

Should *have*, Could *have*, Would *have* (NOT, should of, could of, would of)

Frequently Misspelled Words.

Definitely, all right, a lot (two words), occasion, vacuum, parmesan, broccoli, accommodate, knowledgeable, recommend, leisure, privilege, inadvertent, reimbursable, no one (two words).

That *versus* Which.

There is a subtle difference between these two words which is confusing. Use whatever sounds right. However, the relative pronoun *that* is restrictive, which means it tells you a necessary piece of information about its antecedent: for example, "The word processor *that* is used most often is WordPerfect." Here the *that* phrase answers an important question: which of the many word processors are we talking about? And the answer is the one that is used most often. *Which* is non-restrictive: it does not limit the word it refers to. An example is "Penn's ID center, *which* is called CUPID, has been successful so far." Here *that* is unnecessary: the *which* does not tell us which of Penn's many ID centers we're considering; it simply provides an extra piece of information about the plan we're already discussing. "Penn's ID Center" tells us all we really need to know to identify it

It boils down to this: if you can tell which thing is being discussed without the *which* or *that* clause, use *which*; if you can't, use *that*.

There are two rules of thumb you can keep in mind. First, if the phrase needs a comma, you probably mean *which*. Since "Penn's ID center" calls for a comma, we would not say "Penn's ID Center, that is called CUPID." Another way to keep them straight is to imagine *by the way* following every *which*: "Penn's ID center, *which* (by the way) is called CUPID. . . ." The *which* adds a useful, but not grammatically necessary, piece of information. On the other hand, we wouldn't say, "The word processor which (by the way) is used most often is WordPerfect," because *the word processor* on its own isn't enough information — *which* word processor?

*Excerpted from the Guide to Grammar and Style
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