

# **Thompson's Guide to Writing Conventions**

**Not All the Rules, Just the Most Important Ones**



***Grammar and Punctuation Every Ninth Grader Ought to Know***

*Revised 09/17/11*



## Punctuation Patterns

### *Another Way of Looking at the Punctuation Rules*

1. **Sentence.**

Example: I went to the swimming pool.

2. **Sentence. Sentence.**

Example: I went to the swimming pool. I swam twenty laps.

3. **Sentence, coordinating conjunction sentence. (Comma Rule #1)**

Example: I went to the swimming pool, and I swam twenty laps.

4. **Sentence; sentence. (Semicolon Rule #1)**

Example: I went to the swimming pool; I swam twenty laps.

5. **Sentence; independent marker, sentence. (Semicolon Rule #2)**

Example: I went to the swimming pool; however, I did not swim very far.

6. **Introductory material, sentence. (Comma Rule #5)**

Introductory word: Generally, I swim twenty laps every morning.

Introductory phrase: Hoping to stay in shape, I swim twenty laps every morning.

Introductory (dependent) clause: Because I hope to stay in shape, I swim twenty laps every morning.

7. **Sentence, phrase. (Comma Rule #7)**

Example: I swim twenty laps every morning, hoping to stay in shape.

8. **Sentence\*: word or phrase or list or sentence. (Colon Rule #1)**

There is one main benefit of swimming: health.

I have a simple motto: "Born to swim."

I swim for many reasons: health, endurance, strength, and fun.

\*A complete sentence must come before the colon!

## Other Punctuation Rules

**Non-essential interrupters are enclosed in commas. (Comma Rule #3)**

I swim, as do both my children, for exercise.

Elizabeth, my daughter, is trying to get a swimming scholarship.

The pool, which was closed on Labor Day, is where I swim.

*(Non-essential interrupters can be removed without changing the meaning or clarity of the sentence. If you can remove an interrupter and the sentence is still clear, you need the commas around it...both of them!)*

**Three or more items in a series are separated by commas. (Comma Rule #4)**

Have one fewer commas than there are items. (Yes, put a comma before the *and*.)

Example: I take a swimsuit, goggles, and a towel to the pool.

Example: I swim twenty laps on Tuesday, thirty laps on Thursday, and forty laps on Saturday.

**Commas separate two or more adjectives that describe the same word.**

**(Comma Rule #2)** If they are *not* joined by a conjunction, two or more adjectives that describe the same noun or pronoun need commas between them.

Example: The cool, blue water in the pool is inviting.

Example: The water in the pool is cool, blue, and inviting.

Example: Look at that bald guy's desperate, thrashing backstroke.

Example: It's almost as bad as his ponderous, uncoordinated, gasping freestyle.

## Common Punctuation Problems

**Run-on Sentence (Fused Sentence):** A run-on sentence is created when you punctuate two complete thoughts (independent clauses) as though they are only one sentence.

Incorrect Example: The pool was closed for Labor Day I could not swim.

Corrected: The pool was closed for Labor Day. I could not swim. (Punctuation Pattern #2)

Corrected: The pool was closed for Labor Day, so I could not swim. (Comma Rule #1)

Corrected: The pool was closed for Labor Day; I could not swim. (Semicolon Rule #1)

Corrected: Because the pool was closed for Labor Day, I could not swim. (Comma Rule #5)

Corrected: I could not swim because the pool was closed for Labor Day.

*(With so many ways to do it right, there is no excuse for doing it wrong!)*

**Comma Splice:** A comma splice is created when you connect two complete thoughts (independent clauses) with only a comma. Some fools believe that if they have a run-on sentence, they can correct it with a comma. **WRONG! VERY BAD! DO NOT DO IT!**

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Corrected: The pool was closed for Labor Day, so I could not swim. (Comma Rule #1)

Corrected: The pool was closed for Labor Day; I could not swim. (Semicolon Rule #1)

Corrected: Because the pool was closed for Labor Day, I could not swim. (Comma Rule #5)

Corrected: I could not swim because the pool was closed for Labor Day.

*(With so many ways to do it right, there is no excuse for doing it wrong!)*

**Sentence Fragment:** A sentence fragment is created when you punctuate something that is not a complete thought (independent clause) like it is a sentence.

Incorrect Example: Closed for Labor Day. (*What was closed?*)

Incorrect Example: Diving off the edge of the pool. (*Who was diving?*)

**Do not separate the subject of a sentence from the verb with a comma...or any other punctuation mark.** (Subjects are underlined and *verbs* are italicized in these examples.)

Incorrect Example: The bald man in the pool, *swam* twenty laps.

Corrected Example: The bald man in the pool *swam* twenty laps.

**Commas and *because*\***

**If a *because* clause (dependent clause) begins a sentence, put a comma after it.** (This applies to any dependent marker, but most errors are with *because*.)

Example: Because the pool was closed, the bald man could not swim.

**If a *because* clause (dependent clause) ends a sentence, do not put a comma before it.**

Example: The bald man could not swim because the pool was closed.

\* There is almost never a comma immediately before or after the word *because*.

**Commas and *and***

**Just because a sentence contains the word *and* doesn't mean it always needs a comma. Don't use commas to separate compound subjects or compound verbs.**

Example: The old man swimming in the pool and the kid standing there laughing at him are related. (No comma!)

Example: I put on my goggles and flippers and began to swim. (No comma!)

## Grammar Terms

**Verb:** A *verb* is the word that expresses the action in a sentence.

Example: I swim. (What do I do? I swim. So *swim* is the verb. Get it?)

**Subject:** A *subject* is the person or thing that performs the action expressed by the verb.

Example: I swim. (Who swims? I do. So *I* is the subject. Get it?)

**Phrase:** A *phrase* is a group of words that does not contain both a subject and a verb

Example: swimming in the pool (Who is swimming? No subject here. Get it?)

**Clause:** A *clause* is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb.

Example: I swim. (I = subject; swim = verb – Of course this clause could be part of a larger collection of words: “When I swim...” or “I swim in the lake...”)

**Independent Clause:** An *independent clause* is a group of words that contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought, so it may stand alone as a complete sentence.

Example: I swim three times a week.

**Dependent Clause:** A *dependent clause* is a group of words that contains a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought. A dependent clause by itself is *not* a complete sentence; it is *dependent* on other words to be part of a complete sentence.

Example: Since I swim three times a week... (Not a complete sentence)

**Dependent Marker:** A *dependent marker* is a word added to the beginning of an independent clause that makes it into a dependent clause. Here are some: *after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, when, whenever, whether, and while.* (Dependent marker + independent clause = dependent clause.)

Example: Since I swim three times a week... (*Since* is the dependent marker.)

**Independent Marker:** An *independent marker* is a connecting word used at the beginning of an independent clause. These words can always begin a sentence that can stand alone. Here are some: *also, consequently, furthermore, however, moreover, nevertheless, and therefore.* They are usually followed by a comma.

Example: I swim three times a week; consequently, I have big lungs.

Example: Also, I am always exhausted.

**Coordinating Conjunction:** *Coordinating conjunctions* connect words, phrases, and clauses. There are seven of them: **for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.** Remember them by thinking of this acronym: FANBOYS -- **f**or, **a**nd, **n**or, **b**ut, **o**r, **y**et, **s**o.)

## Sentence Types

**Simple Sentence:** A *simple sentence* is one independent clause: one subject, one **verb**.

Example: I swam twenty laps on Thursday morning.

**Compound Sentence:** A *compound sentence* is two (or more) independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction or a semicolon.

Example: I swam twenty laps this morning, and all day I was tired.

Example: I swam twenty laps this morning; all day I was tired.

**Complex Sentence:** A *complex sentence* is made up of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. (Dependent clauses are underlined in these examples.)

Example: Since I swam twenty laps this morning, I am very tired.

Example: I am very tired because I swam twenty laps this morning.

**Compound-Complex Sentence:** A *compound-complex sentence* is made up of two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. (*Dependent clauses* are *italicized* in this example, and independent clauses are underlined.)

Example: I swam twenty laps this morning *before the sun came up*, but I did not get to school on time *because I swam so slowly*.

## Resources and References

Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Commas: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/01/>

Sentence Patterns: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/604/01/>

Clauses: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/598/01/>

The Writing Center: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/index.html>

Commas: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/commas.html>

Fragments and Run-ons: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/fragments.html>

Sentence Patterns: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/sentencepatterns.html>

Online English Grammar: <http://www.edufind.com/english/grammar/>

Guide to Grammar and Style: <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/contents.html>

Grammar Slammer: <http://englishplus.com/grammar/>

HyperGrammar: <http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/grammar.html>

Grammar Bytes: <http://www.chompchomp.com/menu.htm>

Common Errors in English: <http://www.serendipity.li/errors.html>

Grammarerrors.com: <http://www.grammarerrors.com/>

Grammar Girl: <http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>

Grammar Guide: <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>

Online Grammar Guide: <http://www.world-english.org/grammar.htm>

Grammar Punk: <http://www.grammarpunk.com/>

