

PUNCTUATION FOR WRITERS teaches writers how to use punctuation intentionally and intelligently to direct the reading of their work. Instead of regurgitating the same old rules, it renders punctuation a writer's tool instead of a writer's bane.

Punctuation for Writers

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Punctuation for Writers

*An instructive reference text for
Writers of Fiction, Essays & Poetry*

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Introduction to the Second Edition

When the first printing of the first edition of this book began to run out, the publisher and I considered simply running a second printing, but I'd received so much valuable input from those who'd used the first edition that I soon decided a second edition was necessary. Much of the original text from the first edition, validated as it was by real writers around the globe, remains unchanged, but I've also added information to make this reference more valuable to you, the reader.

I'm ever cognizant that the value of a book like this rests not only with the information it conveys, but with concrete examples. To that end, I've added more examples of certain uses of punctuation as well as a short chapter on the use of punctuation in poetry, a subject that is dear to my heart. Finally, I've added a new appendix that both serves as a sample manuscript format and discusses the mechanics of manuscript preparation. I hope you will find this edition not only useful, but as entertaining and enjoyable as the first.

More than that, I hope you will realize the most important lesson this book has to impart: *each mark of punctuation affects the reader in a particular way and causes a particular reaction*. It forces the reader the pause for a particular length of time, thereby conveying a sense that adds to the meaning of the sentence and paragraph. Once you are aware of *why* the various marks of punctuation work the way they do and the

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effect each has on the reader, you will no longer need to memorize dozens or hundreds of arbitrary “rules.” Instead, you will use punctuation proactively as a tool to direct the reading of your work, as it was intended.

Introduction to the First Edition

Whether you’re a beginning writer or an old pro, a full- or part-time freelancer, a student writer, an essayist, a short story writer, a novelist, or a poet, punctuation is the third most important tool in your inventory. It ranks only after your ability to form letters from lines, circles, and arcs, and your ability to arrange those letters into words. Unfortunately, punctuation also is one of the most often misused tools at your disposal.

Remember, your most important task as a writer is to *keep the reader reading*, and punctuation has everything to do with that. Well-placed punctuation marks go quietly about their task, smoothly and invisibly guiding the reader through your work. But if it isn’t used well, punctuation becomes far too apparent.

Hasn’t your own reading been interrupted by a misplaced comma? You had to stop reading, go back to where the sentence or line or paragraph last made sense, and mentally repair the error that caused the confusion before you could continue reading. In fact, if you read the newspaper, you probably performed that very exercise this morning.

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Your lack of skill in using punctuation can create the same problem for your reader, actually causing her to stumble through your work as she is forced to stop now and again just long enough to subconsciously repair a damaged line or sentence. Then, if you're very lucky, she'll continue to read. But if the subconscious punctuation-repair process happens too often, reading will quickly become too much like work and the reader will simply put down your book or essay or poem—and if *that* happens too often, she will not spend her hard-earned cash on your other works.

If your reader also happens to be a publisher, an editor, an agent, or a reviewer, your lack of skill in using punctuation can translate into a summary rejection of your work. Conversely, the easier you make it on the editor, agent, or reviewer, the more likely you are to win a contract or a good review. Today more than ever, it really is all up to you.

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