



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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Using Punctuation Aids

The poor reader who disregards the marks of punctuation is like the driver who, while attempting to find his way in a strange city, refuses to follow street signs. The good reader, on the other hand, takes advantage of every attempt on the author's part to make his meaning clear.

A thorough knowledge of the different punctuation marks will help a reader to capture more fully the meaning of a selection.

The Colon

The colon (:) indicates several things.

1. A series of equal facts or ideas will be listed. *He has written four books: a historical novel, a book of plays, and two books of poetry.*
2. An explanation for something said earlier in the sentence. *Mrs. Colon was very angry: her son had smashed the family car.*
3. A direct quotation follows. *The teacher explained: "The process of photosynthesis is actually quite simple."*

The Semicolon

The semicolon (;) has two main uses.

1. It is used before the conjunctions *and*, *but*, or *or* to separate the two complete ideas in a long sentence that already contains commas. *Henry followed the path of least resistance and ate the creamed pickles, vanilla-iced farina, and*

crushed cantaloupe; but when it came to drinking apricot nectar with horseradish, he refused.

2. It is used to separate two complete ideas when the conjunction *and*, *but*, or *or* is omitted. *I wandered into the cool shade of the forest; I was hardly aware of the passage of time.*

Parentheses

Parentheses indicate an additional side remark or an aside to the reader. Dashes may also be used in place of parentheses. *Maria adored Geraldo (the tall, popular, handsome quarterback).*

Read the following paragraph and consider how each of the punctuation marks helps the reader to understand the author's purpose.

There is the first problem with tipping: the more discretion you have in the matter the more unpleasant it is. Tipping is an aristocratic conceit - "There you go, my good man, buy your starving family a loaf" - best left to an aristocratic age. The practicing democrat would rather be told what he owes right up front. Offensively, rich people may delight in peeling off hundred-dollar bills and tossing them out to groveling servants. But no sane, well-adjusted human being cares to sit around and evaluate the performance of some beleaguered coffee vendor.