

The
Landa List

Grammar Guidelines,
Punctuation Principles,
and
Proofreading Practices

David Hatcher and Lane Goddard



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1 Punctuation

Apostrophes

A good tip: Think of the apostrophe as a pointer, or an arrow, pointing to the *owner*, or to the *place* where something is omitted.

It's [shows where "i" goes] *Girl's, girls'* [shows who owns]

RULE 1.1 Use the apostrophe to show possessive case (not always actual ownership).

Examples:

The boy's bicycle (The arrow/apostrophe points to *boy*, so we know that only one boy owns the bike.)

The boys' bicycle (It points to *boys*, so we know ownership is shared—it's owned by two or more boys.)

Where is the men's room?

Can you direct me to the Joneses' house?

Woman's room (It belongs to one woman.)

Women's room (Be careful here. Because *women* itself is plural, *womens'* would be an error, and so would *mens'*.)

Notes:

- With singular nouns ending in an *s*, *sh*, or *z* sound, use either an *apostrophe* and an *s*, or an *apostrophe* alone. Either is okay.
- The possessive case doesn't always mean real ownership. The "pointer" rule still applies, though: *a day's work*, *three hours' time*, *two weeks' wages*.
- When two co-owners are identified separately, you can show possession by the last-named owner or by both owners—your choice.

Last-named owner: *Bill and Martha's kid*

Both: *Bill's and Martha's kid*

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- When the possessive case applies to each noun separately, each takes the possessive form.

Bill's and Martha's cars (Each has separate ownership of at least one car.)

Tom's and Jerry's school grades

- The apostrophe is usually added to the end of compound forms:
my mother-in-law's car, the Queen of England's chauffeur.

NOTE 1.2 Use the apostrophe in contractions, to show where something has been left out (usually by pointing to the place).

Examples:

isn't, don't, the summer of '85, blizzard of '93

NOTE 1.3 Use the apostrophe with some plurals.

Examples:

*Dot your **i's** and cross your **t's**.*

*Mind your **p's** and **q's**.*

*Don't give me any **if's**, **and's**, or **but's**.*

*There are too many **&'s** and **#'s** on this page.*

*She has two **Ph.D.'s** and three **M.A.'s**.*

Notes:

- DO NOT USE APOSTROPHES with possessive pronouns: *ours, yours, theirs, hers, its* (*it's* means "it is" or sometimes "it has"), or *whose* (*who's* means "who is" or sometimes "who has").
- Abbreviations that have periods inside and at the end usually take an apostrophe and an *s*; those with no periods (or with only final periods) take only the *s*.

The school awarded 34 Ph.D.'s.

Our group hired three MBAs last year.

- Names of organizations are often written without apostrophes — *Officers Club, Citizens Bank, Ladies Aid*. It's the organization's choice. So check it out, do it their way.

"Easy reading is curst hard writing."

Oliver Goldsmith



Semicolons

RULE 1.4 Use semicolons between independent clauses (ones that could stand alone as complete sentences) that are NOT joined by one of these words: *and, but, or, nor, for*—and sometimes *so, yet*. (These words are called “pure” or “coordinating” conjunctions.)

Hints:

- If you find yourself looking at two independent clauses, ask yourself if the clauses are joined by one of the pure conjunctions.
- If they are, use a comma.

It's a challenging job, but I know you can do it.

I won't run, for I hate politics.

I understand the rule, and I'll use it.

- If they are not, use a semicolon.

The previous quarter was a tough one; the next quarter may be even tougher.

She planned to leave on Thursday; however, she could not get away until Saturday evening.

Note: Some good writers use a comma between short, contrasting independent clauses in sentences like this one:

She left, he stayed behind.

RULE 1.5 Use semicolons to separate parts of a series when one part (or more) has internal commas.

Examples:

We'll need paint, brushes, and thinner; nails, hammers, and a saw; and three good carpenters.

He brought wine, soda, and glasses; and bread, cheese, and fruit.

Note: DO NOT USE SEMICOLONS to separate items just because they follow a colon.

We chose Landa for three reasons: the quality of the training, the clarity of the examples, and the savoir-faire of the instructors.

Not: “...the quality of the training; the clarity of the examples...”

Colons

RULE 1.6 Use a colon before a long or formal quotation or statement.

Example:

The senator rose, looked around, and began:

RULE 1.7 Use a colon before a clarifying or illustrating item or series.

Examples:

Assembly will require three things: pliers, a screwdriver, and patience.

We have only one thing to fear: fear itself.

Mnemonics are like jokes: our own are always better.

RULE 1.8 Use a colon after the salutation of a formal letter.

Example:

Dear Senator Lane:

RULE 1.9 Use a colon between hours and minutes, chapter and verse.

Example:

10:46 p.m., John 3:16

Quotation Marks

RULE 1.10 Use quotation marks to enclose someone else's exact words.

Examples:

"No," she said, "I'll never do that."

"Frankly, my dear," he replied, "I'm careless."

Notes:

- With a quotation of more than one paragraph, use quotation marks at the beginning of each paragraph, and at the end of the whole quotation.
- Long or formal quotations are sometimes centered (indented from both sides), with *no* quotation marks.

RULE 1.11 Use quotation marks to enclose parts (not wholes) of publications (see “Italics” at the end of this section for a broader listing).

Examples:

One chapter of the book is called “Way of the Wind.”

Time has an article called “Where Are the Flowers?”

“*The Raven*” is in **Collected Works of Poe**.

We read the “Style” section of *The Washington Post*.

RULE 1.12 Use quotation marks to enclose words used in an unusual sense.

Example:

She used the paddle to “encourage” her students.

RULE 1.13 Use quotation marks to enclose words, letters, numbers.

Example:

There are two “2’s” and three “but’s” in this sentence. (These are sometimes underlined or italicized instead.)

Using Quotes With Other Marks:

Quotes used with other marks cause a lot of trouble. Here are the American rules (British rules are different).

- Periods and commas go **inside** the closing quotes. (Remember: they’re small, so they slip inside easily.)

She said “No,” but later said “Maybe.”

- Semicolons and colons (bigger) go **outside**.

She said “Never”; I think that’s her final answer.

- Question marks and exclamation marks go with the words that ask the question or show emotion.

Did he say “Yes”?

He said, “What have we here?”

“Let’s get out of here—this pressure gauge says ‘1800!’”

The defendant then brandished a pistol and shouted “Holdup!”

- Use single quotes for a quote within a quote.

He turned and said, “The admiral’s reply was ‘Nuts,’ and that’s my answer to you as well.”

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- Use brackets to insert your own words into quoted material.

He said, “Whenever I see that car [the Reo], I smile.”

The exact words of the clerk were: “Whom [sic] shall I say is calling?”

“Here are a couple of pounds for petrol [gasoline] for the trip,” Sidney said.

Notes:

- DO NOT USE QUOTATION MARKS with **indirect** quotations.
She said that she’ll do it.
- DO NOT USE QUOTATION MARKS with well-known or humorous expressions.
Not: *We must “put our shoulders to the wheel” to reach our goals.*

Periods

RULE 1.14 Use periods after declarative sentences (those that make statements).

Examples:

We learn many things in class.

Terminal punctuation is a dread disease.

RULE 1.15 Use periods after indirect questions that are phrased as declarative sentences.

Examples:

He wondered where she could be.

She asked where the zircon was.

But: *Did she ask where the zircon was?*

*“Our future depends on how well we inform each other
—to fail in the use of language is clearly an unsocial
act.”*

Robert Gunning, writing consultant



RULE 1.16 Use periods after polite requests phrased as questions.

Examples:

Will you please mail me a catalog.

Waiter, may I have the check.

Will you please come by to discuss your promotion.

Can you come to the president's office one day this week.

But: *May I borrow your new car, Sid?*

Would you mind if I copied your paper?

Can you tell me where the secret society meets?

Note: A good test—ask yourself if a negative reply would be reasonable. If so, use a question mark; if not, use a period.

RULE 1.17 Use periods after directions or mild commands.

Examples:

Go to your separate meeting rooms now.

Get out your exercise books.

Report to the office right away.

RULE 1.18 Use periods after most abbreviations (check your dictionary if you're not sure).

Examples:

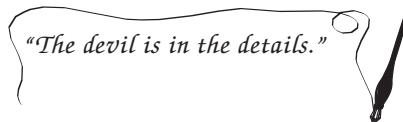
Ph.D., Maj. Chris Smith, Ms. Johnson

But: *HUD, CIA, PX, etc.*

Note: If an abbreviation comes at the end of a sentence, use only one period.

Washington, D.C., is where we met.

But: *We met in Washington, D.C.*



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RULE 1.19 Use periods in threes (ellipsis) to show where something has been left out.

Examples:

“Give me liberty, or...death.”

Add a fourth period if needed to end a sentence. “Give me liberty....”

Note: A typographical ellipsis character is available in most word-processing programs.

Question Marks

RULE 1.20 Use question marks after *direct* (not indirect) questions.

Examples:

What will you have?

But: He asked what you'll have. Not: ...what you'll have?

RULE 1.21 Use questions marks to indicate the writer's uncertainty.

Example:

Shakespeare's birth (on April 23?) was an important event.

RULE 1.22 Use question marks after each “little question” in an unlettered, unnumbered series within a sentence.

Examples:

Did you ask about his family? his profession? his income?

Do we have sugar? flour? butter?

Exclamation Points

RULE 1.23 Use an exclamation point after a forceful interjection, to show strong feelings.

RULE 1.24 Use exclamation points rarely.

Note: Overuse of the exclamation point is considered a sign of immature writing. This mark is rarely used in business correspondence or in other formal writing.

Commas

RULE 1.25 Use a comma to separate independent clauses joined by a coordinating (pure) conjunction: *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for* (and sometimes *so*, *yet*).

Examples:

We waited all night, but the plane didn't arrive.

The office picnic was great, and the food was excellent.

RULE 1.26 Use a comma to set off *introductory* words, clauses, and phrases.

Examples:

After lunch, we had dessert.

When he read the report, he was startled.

But: *He was startled when he read the report.*

RULE 1.27 Use commas to set off “nonessential” sentence elements.

Note:

- In the first sentence below, *who works hard* is not essential to identifying the person who will succeed. In the second, *who works hard* is essential.

Margaret, who works hard, will succeed.

A person who works hard will succeed.

Examples:

The supervisor, a volatile man, began shouting.

The poet Dickenson is a superb wordsmith.

RULE 1.28 Use commas to separate items in a series.

Example:

We had tea, toast, and marmalade. (The last comma is optional.)

“...use of the comma is mainly a matter of good judgment, with ease of reading as the end in view.”

Chicago Manual of Style



RULE 1.29 Use commas to separate *coordinate* (equal) adjectives.

Notes:

- To test for comma use, ask yourself if the word “and” could go between the adjectives without changing the meaning. If so, use a comma.

She was a thoughtful, attentive, careful writer.

The old, ragged, mud-stained coat was discovered.

- If the word “and” does not seem okay, don’t use a comma.

We’re planning an exciting Christmas swim party.

RULE 1.30 Use commas to set off the main elements in dates or places.

Examples:

May 3, 2000 (But: May 2000, spring 2001)

He lived at 10 Main St., Erwin, Tennessee.

RULE 1.31 Use commas to prevent misreading.

Examples:

Long before, he had written his will.

Still, water is needed on the farm.

RULE 1.32 Use commas to set off nouns of direct address.

Examples:

Yes, Nate, you must rewrite this.

Sir, you may come in now.

You’re wonderful, teacher.

RULE 1.33 Use commas to set off direct quotations (someone’s exact words).

Example:

“No,” she said, “it was Randolph.”

RULE 1.34 Use commas with inverted names.

Example:

Smith, Edward

RULE 1.35 Use a comma after the salutation of a personal letter.

Example:

Dear John,

RULE 1.36 Use commas to separate (into groups of three) numbers of five or more digits.

Example:

186,300 mps

Notes:

- DO NOT USE A COMMA between subject and verb.
Not: The ruler of the island chain, was a huge woman.
- DO NOT USE A COMMA after the last item of a series.
Not: We had soda, cheese, and crackers, before dinner.

Parentheses

Note: Use parentheses in pairs (one is a parenthesis).

RULE 1.37 Use parentheses to set off something added to clarify, explain, etc.

Examples:

You'll need a pop-rivet gun (from a hardware store) and a file.

He spoke often of Guam (he'd spent a year there) and of Irma (his former nurse).

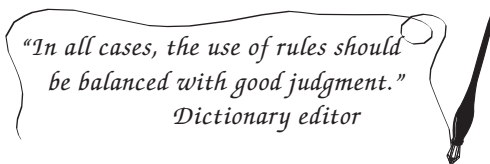
Note: In technical directions, brackets are often used.

Attach the gimflay [item 9] to the main fribble bar.

RULE 1.38 Use parentheses to set off numbers or letters used as list-indicators.

Example:

The area produces (1) tobacco, (2) corn, and (3) dairy products.



Brackets

RULE 1.39 Use brackets to set off something inserted into quoted material.

Examples:

The reviewer wrote, "This actor [Connor O'Brien] is great."

He picked up the phone and said, "Whom [sic] shall I say is calling?"

RULE 1.40 Use brackets as parentheses within parentheses.

Example:

They invited one politician (Senator Kennedy [D-Mass.]) and one businessman.

RULE 1.41 Use brackets to clarify directions.

Examples:

Buy the gasket [available at auto-supply stores], and carefully study the diagram [Fig. 3-A] before you install it.

Hyphens

RULE 1.42 Use a hyphen to divide a word at the end of a line.

RULE 1.43 Use hyphens with unit modifiers (especially if needed to clarify).

Examples:

a little-read book

a small-dog show

a foreign-trade advocate

a long-forgotten letter

"If you take hyphens seriously you will surely go mad."

John Benbow,

in the Oxford University Press Stylebook



RULE 1.44 Use hyphens with some compounds.

Note: All spelled-out, two-word numbers from twenty-one through ninety-nine are hyphenated; so are “self” compounds.

“self” compounds: *self-destructive, self-starting*

compound numbers: *twenty-one, ninety-nine*

RULE 1.45 Use hyphens to avoid tripling a consonant: *cell-like*.

RULE 1.46 Use a hyphen to prevent confusion with another word.

Examples:

re-form (to shape again)

re-creation (to make again)

re-petition (to ask again)

re-present (to give again)

re-lease (to rent again)

Dashes

Note: Dashes are sometimes written as two hyphens; however, most word-processing software provides a dash character, called an “em dash.” (A shorter dash, called the “en dash,” is also available.)

RULE 1.47 Use em dashes to show a sudden change or break in a sentence.

Example:

They elected—can you believe this?—Melvyn Dorquey.

RULE 1.48 Use em dashes before words that summarize.

Example:

Sailing, singing, and sunning ourselves—those were our only tasks.

RULE 1.49 You may use en dashes instead of hyphens to show inclusive numbers.

Examples:

June 4–6, 1987; pages 432–485; 4:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.

Interrupters

Punctuation marks (usually commas, parentheses, or dashes) are used to set off something inserted into a sentence.

Hints:

- For normal breaks, use commas.
The pitcher, Johnson, was hurt.
- For slightly stronger breaks, use parentheses.
The coat (an old, tattered thing) lay on the chair.
- For even stronger breaks, use dashes.
That man—I'll never know where he came from—saved our lives.

Italics

Note: If you are writing by hand or using a typewriter, underline where italics would be used. (E.g., I'm reading War and Peace.)

rule 1.50 Use italics to emphasize words (use sparingly).

rule 1.51 Use italics to mark foreign terms.

Example:

C'est la vie means "that's life."

rule 1.52 Use italics with certain titles (e.g., book titles).

Note: It's hard to remember whether to use italic type or quotation marks for different kinds of titles. A good rule is to use italics for titles of *whole* works, and quotes for titles of *parts* or *sections* (or short works). This chart gives more detail:

Use Italics (or underlining)

Books (except sacred works
like Bible, Koran, Torah)
Magazines
Newspapers
Movies
Plays
Art works
Craft (ships, trains, planes, spacecraft)

Use Quotes

Chapters
Essays
Articles
Stories, columns
Speeches
Radio or TV programs
Songs, poems