Good Writing Practice

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Syntactic punctuation distraction

Comma: Misusage

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Introduction

f the punctuation is distracting, so is the syntax. Often a comma is misused (not sufficiently explicit) for its intended function especially in the presence of another comma with a different function. Consequently, a stronger (1. semicolon, 2. colon), weaker (3. parentheses) mark of punctuation, or a lexical marker (4. direct statement) is necessary for clarity.

Stronger marks of punctuation Example 1: Semicolon

(Material and Methods section) Blowwhittaker, Boston, MA

Revision

Blowwhittaker; Boston, MA

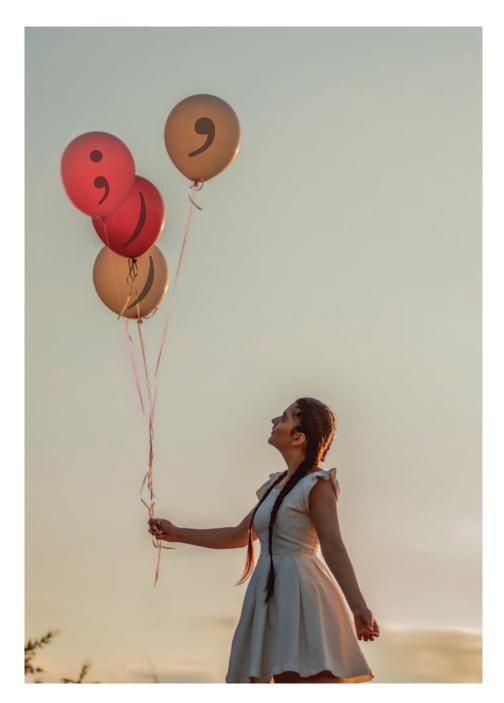
At the phrase level, a semicolon is useful to separate syntactic units one of which contains an internal comma.

The semicolon, a visual hybrid of a period and a comma, is intermediate in explicity between a comma and a period. The period marks the end of a sentence; the semicolon marks an interrelation between independent clauses of a compound sentence and between syntactic units in apposition.

Example 2: Colon

(Results section: results statement)

This sensitivity correlated with enhanced T-cell accumulation in CCL25 expression sites, the intestinal epithelium, and the intestinal lamina propria.



Revision

This sensitivity correlated with enhanced T-cell accumulation in CCL25 expression sites: the intestinal epithelium, and the intestinal lamina propria.

Notes

The pattern at first seems to be three objects (sites, epithelium, and propria) of the preposition in. However, a more explicit mark (colon) is necessary to distinguish the forecasting noun sites from the following two appositives. Unless the reader immediately knows that the intestinal epithelium and the lamina propria are CCL25 expression sites, the comma after *sites* mis-marks the first of three sites for T-cell accumulation.

A colon would be disruptive between core constituents of a sentence such as a transitive verb and direct object (measures included: the Fugl-Meyer assessment). Disruption is also a consequence between a present participle and its object (several measurements including: the irregularity index), and between a preposition and its object (such as: approaches).

For another perspective, a complete sentence should precede a colon. Thus, 'the following' is often added (*measurements including the following*:)

Weaker mark of punctuation

Example 3: Parentheses

(Introduction section: Research problem)

Although the complex movement in tennis depends on many factors, such as players' somatic traits, grip force, and sometimes mental status, many researchers propose to investigate a variety of scaling variables for lower limbs, such as joint laxity, soft-tissue flexibility, and power output.

Revision

Although the complex movement in tennis depends on many factors (e.g., players' somatic traits, grip force, and sometimes mental status) many researchers propose to investigate a variety of scaling variables for lower limbs (e.g., joint laxity, soft-tissue flexibility, and power output).

Notes

In the Example, the commas segregating the examples of factors and scaling variables for lower

limbs are not distinguishable from the commas between the examples. In contrast, the parentheses explicitly segregate the secondary information from the primary.

Without the *e.g.*, the list would appear complete because of the *and*.

There is a punctuational hierarchy to differentiate secondary parenthetic information: emdash (emphasis); comma (slight emphasis); parentheses (deemphasis).

Lexical marking instead of punctuation

Example 4: Past participial phrase

(Introduction section: Research problem background)

Membrane-bound granule<u>s, w</u>hich are caused by peroxidation, are composed of lipofuscin.

Revision

Membrane-bound granules, **most frequently** caused by peroxidation, are composed of lipofuscin.

Notes

The comma segregating the adjective clause initiated by *which* is intended to mark extra information, not to restrict the meaning to a subgroup (usually marked by a comma-less *that are*. This non-restrictiveness of the adjective clause inexplicitly indicates that all membrane-bound granules are formed by peroxidation. However, such non-restrictive marking is often unknown by readers (and even the authors) necessitating the use of an explicit lexical modifier (adverb participial phrase) to clarify meaning.

Another example of inexplicit non-restrictive meaning *My brother, Harvey, is a physician* tests the subtlety of non-restrictive marking; that is, when questioned about how many brothers the punctuation indicates, even English as first language graduate students are unsure. The commas are intended to convey that the name *Harvey* is not necessary to indicate that there is more than one brother.

It would be immediately clear to write *Harvey,* my only brother, is a physician or *Harvey,* one of my two brothers, is a physician.

Tabular Summary

The indicated replacement markers indicate that usage of either specific punctuation or a specific lexical modifier can clarify an inexplicit comma.

Misused comma 1. Company, City, State	Revision Company; City, State	Replacement Semicolon
2. Category, tissue, tissue	Category: tissue, tissue	Colon
Category, example, example, example	Category (example, example, example)	Parentheses
Noun, non-restrictive which- fronted adjective clause	Noun lexical modifier	Superlative adverb + past participial phrase

This is called the hash, pound, or number character. A hashtag is a keyword or set of keywords that is preceded by the # character. It is used in social media to create a thread of conversations around a specific theme or topic conveyed in short texts or microblogs. It is commonly used in Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, etc.

A dictionary of most common hashtags can be found at https://www.hashtags.org/definition/~h/. For your info, EMWA is compiling a list of standarised hashtags for our social media use.



This is called the "at" sign or symbol. The @ sign is part of email addresses and social media user names ("handles"). Our EMWA handles are as follows: @Official_EMWA (Twitter), @EMWA (LinkedIn), and @europeanmedicalwritersassociation (Facebook)

The two most important keys on your keyboard