

## The Big 23 Rules

### Group A: Brake Rules

D43: Use a comma before *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *nor*, *so*, and *yet* when they join independent clauses of a compound sentence.

Example: Brian changed the oil, and Junior washed the car.

D79/D68: Use a semicolon before and a comma after a conjunctive adverb that joins independent clauses.

Example: I bowled 225; however, I don't do that every day.

D80: Use a semicolon between independent clauses that have no connective between them.

Example: I can't leave the house this morning; I have too much to do.

### Group B: Introductory Elements

D57: When an adverb clause precedes an independent clause, set off the adverb clause by a comma.

Example: While you are baiting my hook, I'll dig for more worms behind the boathouse.

D60: Put a comma after an introductory phrase or series of phrases. (Update Rule in *Writing Handbook*)

Examples: Quite a while before dark, bats began to dip, circle, and glide through the long avenue of oaks.  
To perform well, one should practice as if playing a match.  
Walking inside, John could not help but notice the missing chair.  
After the game, we sat in a circle and reflected on our victory.

### Group C: Punctuation in a Series

D30: Separate by a comma only adjectives equal in rank (coordinate adjectives). (They are equal in rank if they can be joined by *and* or if their positions can be reversed without loss of meaning.)

Example: He gave a truthful, courageous answer.

D32: If there is a conjunction between only the last two words, phrases, or dependent clauses in a list-- if, that is, they occur in the form a, b, and c-- separate them by commas, placing the last comma before the conjunction. An exception to this rule is such an expression as "and so forth," "and so on," which is followed by a comma.

Example: Were they red, yellow, or white roses?

D81: Use a semicolon to set off items of a series if the items contain commas.

Example: The Dana Company has branch offices in Billings, Montana; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Tucson, Arizona.

### Group D: General Rules Concerning Commas and Hyphens

D39: Use a comma to set off the second and subsequent items in a reference, a geographical name, a date, an address, personal titles.

Example: Shreveport, Louisiana, is very different from New Orleans.

D47: Set off words in direct address by commas.

Example: Come this way, my friend, to see the giraffe.

D48/51: Set off ordinary nonrestrictive (nonessential) appositives and modifiers by commas.

Example: A white dove, the symbol of peace, appears on the new postage stamp.

D49/53: Do not set off restrictive (essential) appositives or modifiers.

Example: I was referring to Ralph Waldo Emerson the poet not Ralph Waldo Emerson the essayist.

D54: Ordinarily use commas (or an exclamation point) with *oh* and other exclamatory or parenthetical words, phrases, and clauses.

Example: You have a reason, I suppose, for the charges you make?  
He would have come, he explained, if his mother had not hidden his clothes.

D180: Ordinarily hyphenate a compound modifier preceding a noun.

Example: His comment to the teacher was certainly an ill-timed remark.

**Group E: Italics & Quotation Marks**

D132/ 133: Put in quotation marks (but do not italicize) the title of an article, short story, essay, chapter; or of a poem, musical work, or story that is not long enough to make a book itself—whether or not these are mentioned as part of a larger work. Also, put in quotation marks titles of individual segments or programs that are part of larger television or radio series. (Television specials/ shows and movies are put in italics. See D144)

Examples: “On Leisure” from *Essays in Idleness* is a short work. “Theodore Roosevelt” in *The Roosevelts: an Intimate History*  
 “Summertime” from *Porgy and Bess* “Word Association” from *Saturday Night Live*

D144: While the titles of books, pamphlets, plays, and motion pictures are sometimes put in quotation marks, preferred usage calls for italics.

Examples: Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is one of my favorite plays. *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* is a great movie  
 Homer's *The Odyssey* is read in English I. (long poem printed as a book)

D150: Italicize the titles of magazines and newspapers. (the initial article is capitalized and italicized if it is part of the official title.)

Example: I am on the cover of the latest issue of *Newsweek*. *The Times Picayune* is delivered to my home.

**Group F: Quotation Marks & Colons**

D83: Use a colon to formally introduce matter in apposition or to precede an extended explanation. Note that a dash might be substituted for the colon. (See D48 for the use of commas with appositives. See H12 for the use of capitals after a colon.)

Example: The next question that came up for discussion was this: Are the requirements for membership strict enough?

D74/84: Use a comma before a single, complete, directly quoted sentence that occurs within another sentence.

Example: Roger answered, “I cannot tell.”

Use a colon to introduce a quotation of more than one sentence.

Example: Roger answered: “I cannot tell. There are too many aardvarks in the yard.”

D127/128: Put periods and commas inside the second quotation mark; put colons and semicolons outside the second quotation mark.

Example: No, you're thinking of the "Johnson Rag " not the "Tiger Rag." (song titles)

Example: These were included under "necessary expenses": theatre tickets, four new novels, and a foot-long taxi bill.

D129: Put question marks and exclamation points (a) inside the second quotation mark if they belong to the quoted matter or to both the quoted matter and the rest of the sentence; (b) outside, if they belong the rest of the sentence only.

Example: Who wrote the poem "Miniver Cheever"? / Pilate asked, "What is the truth?"

**Group G: Apostrophe/ Possession**

D158: Use 's to form the possessive of singular nouns.

Examples: I like to read Charles Dickens's novels. The woman's shoes were red.

D163: Use only the apostrophe ( ' ) to form the possessive of plural nouns that end in s.

Example: The boys' hats were stolen from their closets.