SAT PUNCTUATION GUIDE

I. COMMAS

1. Using commas in a list or a series

- My favorite colors are blue and white.
- My favorite colors are blue, white, and green.
- She bought eggs and milk.
- She bought eggs, milk, and cheese.
- He came in and turned on the light.
- He came in, turned on the light, and opened the window.
- They want to know what he did and where he went.
- They want to find out what went wrong, where it went wrong, and why it went wrong.

Important Rule
A **comma *alone*** can never link two independent clauses or two complete sentences.

- Incorrect: Peanuts are not nuts, they are beans. (run-on sentence)
- Correct: Peanuts are not nuts; they are beans.
  Peanuts are not nuts. They are beans)
  (Peanuts are not nuts because they are beans.)

- Incorrect: The weather was fine, we went out. (run-on sentence)
- Correct: The weather was fine; we went out.
  The weather was fine, so we went out.

2. Commas with Appositives
An *appositive* is a word or word group that defines or further identifies the noun or noun phrase preceding it.

- Michael visited Austria, a country in central Europe.

- Hamlet, a play by Shakespeare, is her favorite.

- Calcium hydroxide, a chemical used in making paint, is a hydrant.

3. Common Rule: Don't use a comma between a title word and a name or between a subject and a verb right next to it.

Title + name = title name (no comma between the title word and the name)

- **Common Title + Name (No Comma):** the actor Tom Cruise, the author Jane Austen

  In sentences:

  - The actor Tom Hanks won an Oscar.

  - My friend Sarah called me yesterday.

  - The designer Vera Wang created the dress.

  - The astronaut Neil Armstrong walked on the moon.

- The author George Orwell wrote *1984*.
- The novel *Sense and Sensibility* was written by Jane Austen.
- The compound sodium chloride is salt.
- The mineral magnesium sulfate reduces swelling.
- The acid hydrogen chloride is corrosive.

INCORRECT: Political activist and writer**, Fannie Barrier Williams,** was instrumental in helping Black women establish themselves in the North.

CORRECT: Political activist and writer Fannie Barrier Williams was instrumental in helping Black women establish themselves in the North.

3. Comma before the conjunctions and, but, and so, yet (for, nor)
- I like to read novels**, for** they expand my imagination.
- She is kind**, and** that makes everyone love her.
- She didn't call**, nor** did she text.
- He is rich**, but** he is unhappy.
- You'd better hurry up**, or** you will be late.
- He was tired**, yet** he finished his homework.
- It was raining**, so** we stayed home.

4. Modifying/Supplementary Phrases
- Tapping his finger on the table**,** David looked impatient.
- Built in 2008**,** Tokyo Tower is the tallest structure in Japan.
- He rushed out of the room**,** forgetting to turn off the light.

Important Rule
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Common Mistakes
- Incorrect: Peanuts are not nuts, they are beans. (run-on sentence)
- Incorrect: The weather was fine, we went out. (run-on sentence)

II. SEMICOLONS

1. A semicolon may be used instead of a *period* to connect two independent clauses (sentences).

- Peanuts are not nuts**.** They are beans. → Peanuts are not nuts**;** they are beans.
  Incorrect: Peanuts are not nuts**,** they are beans.
- Some people type on a computer; others write with a pen or pencil.
- Incorrect: The cow is brown, it is also old.
- Correct: The cow is brown**;** it is also old.

2. Semicolons may also be used instead of commas in complex lists.

- Michael traveled to Paris, France; Vienna, Austria; Rome, Italy; and Berlin, Germany.

III. COLONS:

How to Use a Colon (:)

A **colon** is used **after a complete sentence** to introduce:

- a list
- an explanation
- an example

Examples:

- ☑ **1. To Introduce a List**
- The team packed the following items**:** water bottles, energy bars, flashlights, and maps.
- She visited four cities**:** Paris, Rome, Berlin, and Madrid.
- ☑ **2. To Introduce an Explanation**
- The experiment produced a surprising result**:** the control group performed better.
- ☑ **3. To Introduce an Example**
- Many animals migrate for survival**:** birds, whales, and caribou.

👉 The part *before* the colon **must be a complete independent clause**.

She visited four cities**:** Paris, Rome, Berlin, and Madrid.

👉 The part *after* the colon can be anything: one single word, one phrase, one independent sentence, or multiple independent sentences.

- There was only one solution**:** wait.
- The experiment produced the expected result**:** the experimental group performed better.

🚫 **Important SAT Rule**

A colon **cannot** separate a verb from its object:

❌ The winners are: Maria and Daniel. → The winners are Maria and Daniel.

❌ Her interests include**:** biology and chemistry. → Her interests include biology and chemistry.