

# Writer's Block Workshop Series

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## ARSENAL OF PUNCTUATION: WRITING FOR SEAMLESS READING

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Long sentences, short sentences, somewhere in between? What makes a great recipe for fluid reading? In this article, we'll explore basic punctuation, how to use it, sentence structure/parts of speech, and the mechanics for churning out some explosive reading. No hardhat? No problem, let's architect some ideas together.



### WHAT IS PUNCTUATION?

A very simple and obvious point is that punctuation creates a clarification in meaning and expression in reading-whether aloud or silently. Punctuation is utilized to express pauses, actions, and stylistic expressions of words.

### TYPES OF PUNCTUATION

Let's explore the most commonly used punctuation and some working examples.

- **Periods**- Utilized to end a sentence that makes a statement or a form of abbreviation in an acronym such as Mr. A.D.
- **Comma**-A tool that provides separation between phrases, words, or clauses including but not limited to lists of items. *I enjoy olives, green pepper, and onion on my pizza.*
- **Semicolon**- Joins two independent clauses not connected which signifies that each of the two clauses can stand on their own as a separate sentence. *I had to wear a scratchy school uniform; that was the most uncomfortable four years of my life.*
- **Colon**-Utilized to precede a list, colons may be used for salutations of a letter, between numbers to indicate time, formally introduce a sentence, quotation, or question, as well as, introduce a list. *Dear Ms. Johnson: Amy brought her snacks: butter, popcorn, and salt.*
- **Dash**-A line that indicates a change in the sentence or a relatively sudden break in thought or idea. *One subject I always liked-social studies.*

## TYPES OF PUNCTUATION CONTINUED

- **Question mark**-To pose a direct question. *When will you be coming to the party?*
- **Parenthesis**-Utilized around words to ensure clarity.
- **Apostrophe**-To indicate possessive or contraction between a word. *My father's glasses can't be found.*
- **Brackets**-Used before and after material where information is not part of the main content or for quoting another writer. *His conclusion was that "they [the students] should be able to choose one elective for the school year."*
- **Hyphen**-Used to join words to create compound words and/or numbers. *Forty-one, U-turn, mother-in-law*
- **Exclamation point**-To express a strong feeling or thought. *I can't believe it!*
- **Quotation marks**-Utilized in pairs, they are placed before and after words to be spoken aloud. *"Please ensure your seatbelt is fastened for the entire duration of the ride."*



## PARTS OF SPEECH

There are eight parts of speech: noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, conjunction, preposition, and interjection. Let's see this in action.



- **Noun**-A person, place, thing, or idea that are grouped in classes: proper, common, concrete, abstract, and collective. Proper nouns are always capitalized whereas common nouns are not.  
*Grandma Anna, Friday (proper)*  
*rainbow, winter, happiness, love, fence (common)*
- **Pronoun**-Utilized in place of a noun. They can be simple, compound, or phrasal.  
*I, you, she, he, it (simple)*  
*myself, yourself, himself, ourselves (compound)*  
*one another, each other (phrasal)*
- **Verb**-A word that expresses action, existence, state, or occurrence. Many words can be intransitive or transitive. An intransitive verb completes its action without the object.  
*Many famous people **joined** him on stage. (action)*  
*They **were** present to honor the award recipient. (existence)*  
*I drove my car. (transitive)*  
*I drove over the lane line. (intransitive)*
- **Adjective**-A word that is used to describe a pronoun or noun. A, an, and the, which are known as articles can also be adjectives.  
*Why did the **peculiar** Dodo bird become an **extinct** species?*

## PARTS OF SPEECH CONTINUED

- **Conjunction**-A conjunction connects individual words or groups of words.  
*Air and plane combine to make the compound word airplane.*  
A pufferfish is short **and** round. (The conjunction connects the word **short** to the word **round**.)
- **Preposition**-A word (or group of words) to indicate how two words or ideas relate to each other.  
*The tissue hung **under** Natasha's nose. (**Under** shows the relationship between the verb, **hung**, and the object of the preposition, **nose**.)*
- **Interjection**-A word that expresses meaning or feeling. Many interjections are used at the beginning of a sentence.  
*Whoa, that is a large pizza slice.*  
*I have three loads of laundry to do, ugh.*

## TYPES OF SENTENCES

Let's look at some of the most common sentence types with some examples.

- **Simple sentence**-A sentence that contains only one independent clause or complete thought.  
*My back aches. (simple subject and simple predicate)*  
*My hair and nails are long. (compound subject with two nouns and a simple predicate)*
- **Compound sentence**-Two or more simple sentences must be joined by punctuation, conjunction, or by both.  
*The birthday party was a bit hectic, but the joyful feeling was overwhelming.*
- **Complex sentence**-Contains one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses.  
*People sleep a lot when they have a cold. (**People sleep a lot** is the independent clause and **when they have a cold** is the dependent clause.)*

## MECHANICS FOR GREAT WRITING

Wasn't that so much fun? I know, I can just picture your eyes filled with enthusiasm.

However, understanding the foundation for what makes up sentences is key to building some solid writing skills. Now let's get those gears grinding to explore how you can create a formula of success for your next writing project.



## THE DO'S

- 1.) **Write in a clear and concise manner.** Cleanly formulating your idea and supporting the main objective is imperative to a writing project. Even if you are writing a novel, think of your main idea as the trunk of a tree, the paragraph-the branches, and the sentences-the leaves. Each sentence should support your paragraphs to eventually capture the entire story. Like keeping a tree healthy, trim any content that is not supporting the idea as a whole.
- 2.) **Ask yourself: Can this be said in fewer words?** To avoid lengthy or redundant subject matter determine if you can trim sentences. This will also cut down on the amount of punctuation needed.
- 3.) **Utilize punctuation marks such as exclamation points only when necessary.** Why I absolutely enjoy using exclamation points, I do realize they can be distracting or potentially miss the point of what they are used for. If you use them often, they can lose their sense of appeal to a profound thought.
- 4.) **Provide a wealth of various nouns, verbs, and adjectives.** I always have my thesaurus handy. When I write, I use a treasure trove of adjectives and verbs. This allows my readers to create a scene in their minds of what a place may look like or what a character is experiencing. Engaging your senses for what you want to convey is key. This also helps blend a unique style and flavor into your writing which will build fluidity. I try not to re-use the same adjective multiple times in my work as the reading can become dull.
- 5.) **Write with a sense of purpose.** At the end of the day it is your creative work, so ensure you are enjoying what you are writing. The way I judge the end of my project is by asking myself if I could have done any better. If I know I can't, then I am done.

## THE DONT'S

- 1.) **Avoid long sentences or run-on sentences.** While there is no perfect length of how long a sentence should be, aim for fifteen words or less. Why? Long sentences require additional punctuation that may be distracting to the reader. In addition, there may be a lot of information to process for a single thought. If you can trim a sentence in half, do it! Reading shorter sentences will flow easier for comprehension.
- 2.) **Omit words that are not descriptive, read well, or appear awkward.** I often catch myself reading sentences aloud to ensure that is the way I intend them to be read regardless of whether reading is completed in silence. If it sounds awkward to you, it's a good chance your reader will find it awkward as well. Re-word or omit.
- 3.) **Be careful when using acronyms.** If you need to use an acronym in your writing, ensure you define the application from the start. As acronyms can have multiple meanings, it is important to convey how you are approaching the use. Once defined, you can then switch to the acronym later.



## LET'S TRY AN EXAMPLE

Let's take an example of a paragraph by identifying first what needs to be reviewed and how we can craft a better use of words.

### ATTEMPT ONE

*John and Mary and Brad went to the park on a late Sunday afternoon that was raining though they decided to grab their umbrellas to enjoy the fireworks later in the night. They found a spot by a tree to put a blanket down and brought a picnic basket with some sandwiches that were cold cuts.*

### WHAT FAILED IN THIS EXAMPLE?

- Run-on sentences
- Improper punctuation
- Improper verb and noun usage

### REVISION

Let's take a moment to craft a better thought process and place punctuation marks where needed.

*On a late rainy Sunday afternoon, John, Mary, and Brad went to the park. They grabbed their umbrellas, picnic basket, and lunch. Locating an ideal spot under a tree, they enjoyed their cold-cut sandwiches.*



## FINAL PUNCTUATION

Keep the literary gears greased. Adding dimension and depth to your writing without over-complicating is key. Utilize proper punctuation to add emphasis to language, and most of all, do not give up! Writing can be a difficult process but rewarding process.

You have an arsenal of punctuation to use.

Check out the [Writer's Block Writing Workshop Series](#) as well as Authors' Notes for additional writing workshops and resources dedicated exclusively for first-time authors.

Author On.

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