

Workshop Three Supplement. Using the Comma and Punctuating Quotations

Part 1: To Use or Not to Use the Comma

Workshop Two focused on sentence clarity and how the comma maintains clarity when certain types of information are added to a basic sentence. Workshop Three explored the topic of what happens when using commas could lose clarity. Clearly, making the best decision presents challenges because you, the writer, must assess how to link types of information to produce a complete sentence. Problems occur because there are no rules which must always be followed, which is why Wordscope provides guidelines, not rules, to help you in the decision-making process.

For example, a guideline in Workshop Two explained that, depending on where it is placed in the sentence, **nonrestrictive information** is added to a main clause with a comma or commas. Information is generally deemed nonrestrictive if removing it from a sentence leaves a complete sentence afterwards. Another guideline suggests that one way to assess whether or not information is nonrestrictive is to see if it can be moved elsewhere in the sentence. Such “movability” can help determine if the information is nonrestrictive. Study the examples below to refresh your understanding of nonrestrictive information. The nonrestrictive information is in **bold**.

- A: John’s drinking, **a terrible habit**, ruined his chances with Janey.
- B: Janey, **cheerful whenever she had money**, wished that John, **a wealthy man**, would drink less.
- C: Adam and Janey, **both of whom were basically simple-minded**, fell in love instantly.
- D: **Despite Janey’s pleas**, John refused to stay in the small town because it had no pub.

In each of these examples, you can remove the phrase in bold from each sentence, leaving a complete sentence. The phrases in examples **A**, **B**, and **D** could all be

moved to another position in the sentence. The phrase in example **C**, though, cannot be moved elsewhere, though it could be removed from the sentence.

Restrictive information presents the writer with a different set of punctuation issues and adds further complexity to the decision-making process. For example, similar to nonrestrictive information, it is possible occasionally to remove restrictive information and find that a complete sentence still remains. Restrictive information, similarly to nonrestrictive information, can also on occasion be moved within a sentence. To make matters even more complicated, restrictive information could in certain circumstances be treated either as nonrestrictive information and be punctuated or be treated as restrictive and not be punctuated without any loss of clarity.

The most important feature, then, for determining whether or not to treat information as restrictive relates to how it influences the meaning of the main clause. Restrictive information will typically show a direct **causal** or **necessary** relation to the main clause, affecting how we interpret the sentence **as a whole**. If restrictive information shows a causal relationship, even if it is movable within the sentence, the comma is unnecessary. In those cases where the causal link is weak or debatable, you might still decide to treat the information restrictively, omitting the comma so that you can assert a causal connection. A writer can utilise this strategy as a means of convincing the reader to see their point of view. Study the examples below to refresh your understanding of restrictive information. The restrictive information is in **bold**.

- A: It was Janey's overt flirting with Adam **that led to John's outburst**.
- B: The last drink **which John guzzled** led to his complete inebriation.
- C: The people all became sick **who bought fish off the back of the lorry**.
- D: The horse **that ran the slowest** lost the race.
- E: Driving **with six children** is tiring.
- F: Politicians **who tell lies** merit severe punishment.
- G: Books **that say nothing about the world** are the only kind worth reading.
- H: Janey might go out with John **if he stopped drinking to excess**.
- I: The nearby Off-licence would suffer **should John ever quit drinking**.

Notice that in example **C**, you could remove the restrictive phrase and a complete

sentence would remain. If you add the information, though, it has a causal connection to the main clause. It asserts that the neighbours who bought the fish became sick. So, you do not join the phrase to the main clause with a comma.

With examples **A**, **B**, and **G**, the restrictive information is not movable. It is movable in examples **C**, **D**, **E**, and **F**, as well as removable. It cannot be removed from examples **A** and **G** because the remaining statements do not make logical sense. With example **E**, you could opt to treat the restrictive phrase as non-restrictive, putting it between commas. You should notice, though, that if you wanted to move “with six children” after “is tiring,” you would not use a comma after “tiring.”

Examples **H** and **I** provide examples of the special conditional structures that you learned in Workshop Three. Because these conditional phrases indicate a causal or necessary connection to the preceding clause, there is no need to separate the clauses with a comma. If, however, you put the conditional phrase at the beginning of the sentence, you would use a comma to join it to the main clause because the clause then becomes introductory.

Part 2: Using and Punctuating Quotations

Quotation plays a major role in academic writing. A writer typically uses quotation as a form of supporting evidence or to add plausibility or authority to an argument. Quotation can prove helpful in other ways. For example, it often works well to introduce, to develop, to focus, or to conclude an argument. A well-chosen quote often makes the difference between a weak and an effective argument. Readers typically find quotation an important feature of an argument or a presentation.

A writer, however, will often undermine and weaken their work because they do not use quotations effectively. First, clarity is lost whenever a quotation is added to a sentence but not punctuated appropriately. Second, many writers do not integrate quotation into their text effectively because they do not consider the purpose of the quotation in terms of their argument. In other words, how and where it is placed in relation to other forms of information are important considerations. Finally, many writers fail to appreciate the negative impact that a poorly-used quotation produces

on a reader. You can improve your use of quotation by following these simple guidelines:

1. A quotation must fit grammatically into the text: it should read “naturally” or logically as part of the sentence in which it is quoted.
2. It must be punctuated correctly. Depending on circumstances, you can put a comma, a colon, a dash, or nothing before a quotation. You must NEVER put a semi-colon before a quote.
3. You should choose to use either the double-apostrophe (“. . .”) style or the single-apostrophe (‘. . .’) style and then be consistent in its use.
4. You should never use a quotation without a clear context. If a reader cannot understand why a quotation has been used, then you did not use it appropriately.

In what follows below, please remember that different referencing styles employ different conventions. The examples below are not meant to be taken as definitive. If your discipline follows particular “house rules,” then you must follow them.

1. Treat a quotation as you would any word, phrase, or clause which you might add to a sentence and punctuate it accordingly. You should apply the same guidelines for punctuating that you are learning in Wordscope to decide about how to punctuate a quotation. Study carefully the quotations below:

Recent government comments about media ownership are causing alarm. A ministerial remark that “cross-media ownership can raise competition” signals that large media firms have won the argument to expand their activities. As a spokesperson from a major media company said, “deregulation will help us to achieve efficiencies needed for continued financial health.” Refuting this view, John Doe of Media Watch stated that “the argument is flawed. Competition cannot occur when only a few large companies control the industry.” The government refers to its pamphlet “Appeasing Consumers” to prove that “consumers are the prime concern.” This assurance, says Doe, “is just noise and platitudes,” and it actually means that “the deal has already been done.”

You should notice that there is no comma between “that” and “cross-media” or “that” and “the argument” or “that” and “consumers.” These quotations form part of a

restrictive clause, so our guidelines about how to include restrictive information tells us that no commas are needed. A comma goes after “said” because the clause is introductory, the guideline learned in Workshop Two, Section Three, applying in this case. Similarly, we need a comma after “Doe” because the clause is nonrestrictive and after “platitudes” because a main clause follows it. You should also notice that the comma goes **before** the final quote mark, not outside of it, with the double-apostrophe style of quotation mark. The comma goes **after** the final quote mark with the ‘. . .’ style. Examples below illustrate both styles.

2. When a quotation includes a quotation within it, simply use the other quote mark style to indicate the in-text quoted material. This situation usually occurs when you are quoting from an author whose statement also includes a quote from another text. Study the following example carefully:

In his recent speech, the government minister confessed that “his honourable opponent’s charge that he was ‘intellectually vapid’ was accurate.”

3. You will often lose clarity if you use the exact punctuation used in a quote. Fortunately, you can replace punctuation in a quotation to comply with the needs of your text. You may, for example, need to put a comma where a writer used a semi-colon or a full-stop in order for your text to maintain clarity. Study the following example:

According to Carl Jung, ‘Every creative person is a duality or a synthesis of contradictory aptitudes’, but this analysis of the creative personality offers only unquestioned Romantic platitudes.

In the original text, there was a full-stop after “aptitudes,” but your sentence continues, requiring a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

4. If you opt to put reference information in parenthesis after the quotation, you should put the appropriate punctuation mark **after** the parenthesis, not at the end of the quotation. Again, the guidelines for punctuating a quotation as a part of your sentence apply here. You would not, for example, put a full-stop in a

sentence before the end of the sentence. Study the following examples carefully:

- A. Eloisa sees her love as “Warm from the soul, and faithful to its fires” (53-54). She also has “The virgin’s wish” (55), which is to be a virgin no more.
- B. While one observer argues that “the media is obsessed with its own production” (Johnson 124), Gray argues that “consumers are fascinated by the media, so the media feeds that fascination” (25).

5. Use a colon to join a main clause to a quotation which **in itself** could stand as a complete sentence. Study the following examples carefully:

- A: Few readers forget the opening lines of Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times” (1).
- B: The government finally confessed: ‘All efforts to reduce poverty are consciously designed to produce more wealth for those who do not need it’.
- C: The *Guardian* stated: “Bloor lied about weapons of mass destruction.”
- D: Responding to the assembled reporters, the President stated: ‘I was not drunk when I fell down and banged my cheek against the coffee table’.

If you follow the models above, using quotations should not lead to any loss of clarity. You should note that examples **C** and **D** are special structures. The colon before the quotation functions as a substitute for the word “that,” but this structure cannot be used indiscriminately. Study the following examples carefully.

- A. As the medical worker complained, “companies do not often understand the constraints of time.”
- B. When the medical worker complained that “companies do not often understand the constraints of time,” she was relieved of her duties.

Example **A** cannot use a “that” before the quotation. It is an introductory clause, so a colon would lose clarity. For example **B**, the “that” cannot be removed because the structure would then become ungrammatical.

As you proceed through Wordscope programme, you will learn more guidelines about how to punctuate for clarity, and you will be able to apply these guidelines when you need to include a quotation in your text.