



## English Center Reference Guide to Punctuation

This guide is a quick reference to the most common uses of certain punctuation in expository writing.

### Period

Use a period to end a sentence.

Even when the team has a losing season, Auburn football brings crowds of people to the “loveliest village on the plain.” The crowds increase revenues for the city’s businesses.

**Note** that periods and commas, regardless of their function in the sentence, are always placed inside quotation marks. An exception to this rule is the use of periods and commas with parenthetical citations.

### Semicolon

Use a semicolon (1) to separate two independent clauses or (2) to separate items in a list when those items have internal punctuation. **Do not** use a semicolon between items that are unequal in meaning or structure.

- (1) Some faculty members at Auburn like to attend football games; others do not.
- (2) Representatives from the Facilities Division are identifying the costs of tailgating during football season: damages to buildings, including fires; additional personnel, including guards for certain parking lots; and damage to grounds, including replacement of turf destroyed by inappropriate parking and tent stakes.

### Comma

Use a comma (1) to separate the subject of the independent clause from an introductory clause or phrase, (2) to separate items in a series, (3) to separate independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, for, nor, so, yet), and (4) to set off modifiers not essential to the meaning of the sentence. **Do not** use a comma to separate a subject from its verb or a verb from its object. **Do not** use a comma to separate two main clauses not joined by a coordinate conjunction.

- (1) After ridiculing Auburn for accepting a bid to the small-time Independence Bowl, the Alabama coaching staff gladly accepted a bid to the same bowl a few years later.
- (2) Sports for which women can earn scholarships at Auburn are soccer, softball, and basketball.
- (3) Auburn is best known for its football team, but its basketball and baseball teams are gaining popularity, too.
- (4) Auburn University, which almost always has players selected as All-Americans, is known nationally as a football powerhouse.

**Note** that a phrase or clause that modifies a named item is always set off with commas. If the item is made more specific (“which?”) by a modifying phrase or clause, the modifier is essential to understanding the meaning of the sentence and is not set off.

### Colon

Use a colon (1) to set off a list and (2) to separate a highly related explanatory phrase or clause from the rest of the sentence. The part of the sentence on the left of the colon must be an independent clause, able to stand on its own grammatically without the word, phrase, or clause on the right of the colon.

- (1) Typical preparations for a weekend of tailgating include the following: roping off an area for your camper on Tuesday or Wednesday to lay claim to your space, stocking up on beer and food, and bringing your camper to campus on Friday afternoon.
- (2) Every Friday, after a long workweek, Maurice packed up his camper and drove to what was for him the most magical place on earth: Auburn.

### Dash

Use a dash to separate a non-essential phrase from the rest of the sentence. Unlike commas, dashes call attention to the material they set off.

Located in the southeastern part of the state, Auburn University—Alabama’s land-grant institution—was first established before the Civil War as Alabama Male Academy.