**Lesson 04: Punctuation (the comma and the semicolon)**

**Punctuation marks are symbols which organize the structure of written language,** **and indicate intonation and pauses to be observed when reading aloud. Punctuation is used to avoid ambiguity. Consider the following examples:**

Let’s eat, Grandma!

Let’s eat Grandma!

**"Woman, without her man, is nothing" has a different meaning from**

**"Woman! without her, man is nothing"**

**1. The Use of the Comma:**

The comma is used to indicate a brief pause. It is not as final as the period. **There are many comma rules in English, but they are best remembered when they are categorised into four main groups: introducers, coordinators, inserters, and tags.**

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| **Introducer Commas** | An introducer comma follows any element that comes in front of the  First independent clause in a sentence.  **…………………,** INDEPENDENT CLAUSE |
| **Words** | **Generally,** extraterrestrials are friendly and helpful.  **Nervously,** I threw away my cigarettes. |
| **Phrases** | **Dissatisfied with life in his country,** he left to Canada.  **After sixteen years of smoking,** it is not easy to quit. |
| **Dependent clauses** | **Because I have a chronic cough ,** my doctor recommended that I quit  Immediately. |
| **Direct quotations** | **She advised,** “Stop smoking today” |

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| **Coordinator commas** | Together with a coordinating conjunction, a comma links coordinate  (equal) elements in a sentence. |
| **Compound sentence with**  **2independent clauses** | INDEPENDENT CLAUSE**,** **coord. conj.** INDEPENDENT CLAUSE  She has a good job**, yet** she is always broke.  They were tired**, so** they went home early. |
| **Series of 3 or more items**  **Words** | Jack speaks French, English, Spanish, and Creole.  (no comma with only 2 items: Chen speaks Chinese and Creole) |
| **Phrases** | A nurse has to work at night, on weekends, and on holidays. |

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| **Inserter Commas** | An inserter comma is used before and after any element that is inserted in nto the middle of an independent clause.  **INDEPENDENT,** ………….…….**,** **CLAUSE** |
| **Words** | My uncle**, however,** refuses to quit smoking. |
| **Phrases** | Aaron thought he could see the future**, not the past,** in the wrinkles of his skin. |
| **Non-restrictive phrases**  **and clauses** | My cousins**, grieving over their mother’s death**, resolved never to smoke.  My mother**, who just celebrated her fiftieth birthday,** enjoys an occasional cigarette. |
| **Reporting verbs in**  **direct quotations** | “I’ve tried to quit dozens of times**,**” **she says,** “but I can’t” |

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| **Tag Commas** | A tag comma is used when adding certain elements to the end of a sentence  to clarify or confirm information  **INDEPENDENT CLAUSE, ………………………… .** |
| **Words** | My uncle believes in drinking a daily cup of tea**, too.**  He appears to be in good health**, however.** |
| **Phrases** | He swims for an hour every day**, for example.**  The organization is committed to protecting wildlife**, especially pandas.** |
| **Tag questions** | It is not logical**, is it?**  You are coming**, are not you?** |

**2. The use of the semicolon:**

Using semicolons is not difficult if you remember that a semicolon (;) is more like a period than a comma. It is a very strong punctuation mark.

Semicolons separate clauses or phrases that are related and that receive equal emphasis.

**1. To join two independent clauses:**

a. Use a semicolon to combine two closely related independent clauses. Relying on a period to separate the related clauses into two shorter sentences could lead to choppy writing.

**E.g.** Alice is going to Harvard; she isn’t going to Paris.

Be sure to wear clean clothes to the interview**;** appearances are important.

b. Semicolons join two independent clauses (complete sentences) that are closely related if **no coordinating conjunction** is used.

Mary said she was tired; she had stayed up late reading her favourite book.

**2. Before conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases:**

Use a semicolon before **conjunctive adverbs** such as *however,* *therefore, nevertheless, moreover,* and *furthermore*. You may also use a semicolon before some **transition phrases** such as f*or example, as a result, that is, in fact,* etc.

**E.g**. Skiing is dangerous**; however,** millions of people ski.

**E.g**. I have never been to Europe**; in fact,** I have never been outside my country.

**3**. **Between items in a series if the items themselves contain commas.**

Semicolons help avoid confusion be­tween items in lists where there are already commas.

**E.g:** She traveled to **Sao Paulo, Brazil**; **Seoul, South Korea**; and **Nairobi, Kenya**.

The color combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey**;** green, brown, and black**;** or red, green, and brown.