



The Mini Page

Betty Debnam, Founding Editor and Editor at Large

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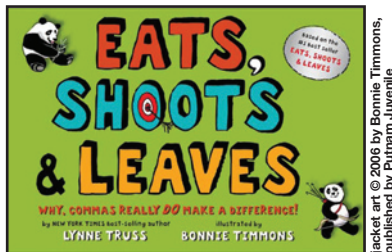
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Language Signals

Punctuation Matters

Have you ever had trouble figuring out what somebody's writing meant? Maybe that was because the writer didn't use proper **punctuation** (PUNK-chuh-WAY-shun). Punctuation marks, such as commas and periods, help us understand the written language.

In honor of National Punctuation Day, Sept. 24, The Mini Page talked with Lynne Truss, author of three punctuation books for kids.

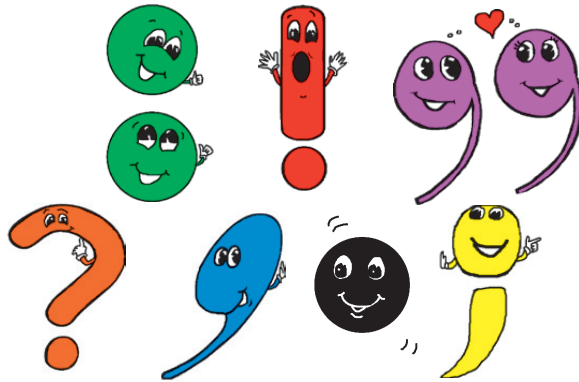


"Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why, Commas Really Do Make A Difference!" shows how punctuation can change the meaning of a sentence.

The phrase "eats, shoots & leaves" was supposed to be about what a panda eats, which is shoots* and leaves of bamboo. The phrase should have been "eats shoots and leaves."

But in a book about animals, the comma was put in the wrong place. This way, it looked as if the panda ate its dinner, took a shot at something, and then left.

*Shoots are new stems and branches.



Who thought of punctuation, anyway?

"Punctuation was invented mainly as a way of telling the reader, 'These words go together' and 'These words need to be kept apart, otherwise the meaning isn't clear,'" Lynne Truss said. "Without punctuation, the meaning of a bunch of words can be much harder to work out!"



Since the beginning of writing, people have used different marks to add more information to written words. For example, ancient Greeks had a system of dots to tell actors how much breath to take before a word or a phrase in a speech.

And along came technology

After the printing press was invented almost 600 years ago, people started making more rules about punctuation.



Readers needed to know where one idea ended and a new one began.



Now, right before our eyes, technology is changing the rules again. Some people leave out capital letters and periods in e-mails and text messages. These writers invent their own rules.

People also use a lot of exclamation points and question marks when texting and e-mailing.

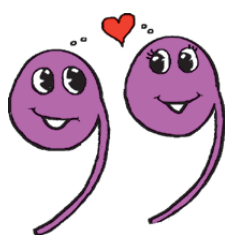
Lynne said: "I love the way people punctuate texts. One of the main features of punctuation is that it gives the reader the sound and rhythm of the writer's voice — exclaiming, querying*, pausing, stopping or running on very fast."

*Query (KWIR-ee) means to ask questions.

The Key to Understanding

The importance of punctuation

Even though rules may be changing for text-messaging and e-mailing, the rules have not changed for regular writing.



If you are writing school papers, letters or a book, commas and other punctuation marks are still needed. Punctuation marks help the reader figure out your message in texts and e-mails too. Use the punctuation rules that fit what you're writing.



Advice to kids

"The main thing (about punctuation) is to notice it!" Lynne said. "Reading is not just getting the sense off the page; it's also about hearing the words; following an argument; listening."



Changing the meaning

If you put a punctuation mark in the wrong place, it can completely change the meaning of the sentence.

For example, look at these two sentences. How does the comma change the meaning?

Call me Tom.



Call me, Tom.



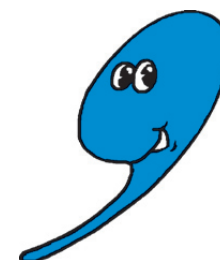
See how a comma changes the meaning of these two sentences:



"Anya walked on her head, a little higher than usual."



"Anya walked on, her head a little higher than usual."



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More to Explore



The Mini Page provides ideas for Web sites, books or other resources that will help you learn more about this week's topics.

At the library:

- Lynne Truss has written two other punctuation books for kids: "The Girl's Like Spaghetti: Why, You Can't Manage Without Apostrophes!" and "Twenty-Odd Ducks: Why, Every Punctuation Mark Counts!"
- Another book to explore is "The Word Snoop" by Ursula Dubosarsky.

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Words that remind us of punctuation are hidden in the block below. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally. See if you can find: COMMA, PERIOD, APOSTROPHE, EXCLAMATION, COLON, SEMICOLON, PLURAL, POSSESSIVE, LANGUAGE, SOUND, TEXT, MARK, SYMBOL, PAGE, READ, END, SENTENCE, PEN, PAY, ATTENTION, WRITE.



Punctuation

TRY 'N FIND

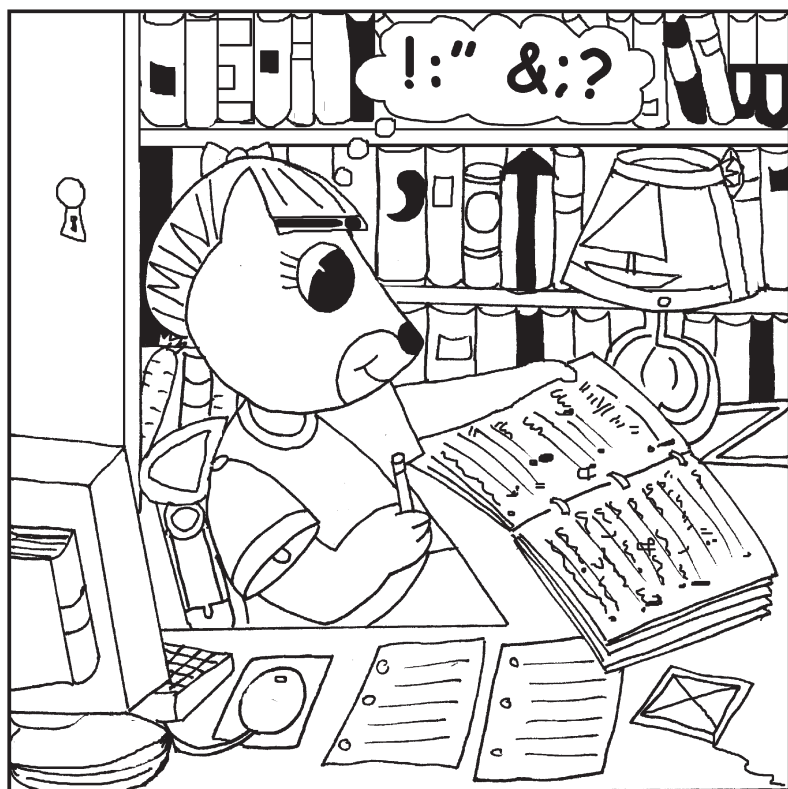
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G	E	S	A	N	A	Y	N	E	P	E	N	D	R	C
U	R	O	V	D	L	K	L	O	B	M	Y	S	A	O
A	I	U	E	V	I	S	S	E	S	S	O	P	L	L
G	O	N	H	E	H	P	O	R	T	S	O	P	A	O
E	D	D	N	O	I	T	A	M	A	L	C	X	E	N

Mini Spy . . .



Mini Spy is working on the punctuation in her notes. See if you can find:

- sailboat • question mark • word MINI • carrot
- olive • letter B • safety pin • ring
- book • kite • letter Z • letter E
- bell • letter D • arrow • banana
- tin can • exclamation mark • comma



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Rookie Cookie's Recipe Broccoli With Orange Sauce

You'll need:

- 1 medium broccoli crown
- 1 cup water
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 tablespoons orange juice
- 2 tablespoons orange marmalade
- 3 to 4 tablespoons chopped walnuts (optional)
- sprinkle of salt and pepper

What to do:

1. Cut broccoli into florets. Place in microwave bowl with water; cover and steam for 3½ minutes.
2. Combine olive oil, orange juice and marmalade in a small saucepan. Cook over medium heat until mixture starts to bubble slightly.
3. Drain broccoli, chop as desired, and sprinkle salt and pepper to taste.
4. Pour orange sauce over broccoli. Top with chopped walnuts.

Makes 4 side servings.

You will need an adult's help with this recipe.

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Meet Jon Cryer



photo courtesy Warner Brothers Pictures

Jon Cryer stars as Dad Thompson in the movie "Shorts." He is best known for his role as Alan Harper in the TV series "Two and a Half Men." He has acted in several movies, including "Pretty in Pink." He has also co-written, produced and directed movies and TV shows.

Jon, 44, grew up in New York City. His father, David Cryer, is an actor, and his mother, Gretchen Cryer, is an actor and writer.

Jon acted in his first commercial when he was 4 years old. He went to a summer acting camp when he was a child. He later went to school for acting in London.

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NEW!

The Mini Page® Book of States

The Mini Page's popular series of issues about each state is collected here in a 156-page softcover book. Conveniently spiral-bound for ease of use, this invaluable resource contains A-to-Z facts about each state, along with the District of Columbia. Illustrated with colorful photographs and art, and complete with updated information, The Mini Page Book of States will be a favorite in classrooms and homes for years to come.

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MIGHTY FUNNY'S

Mini Jokes

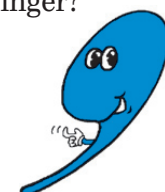
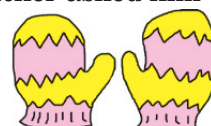
All the following jokes have something in common. Can you guess the common theme or category?

Patton: What did the student say when the teacher asked him to use the word "cousin" in a sentence?
Paul: "I put on my mittens 'cousin' the winter my hands get cold!"

Penny: What makes a point without a finger?
Polly: An exclamation point!

Perry: How did one punctuation mark invite the other to his house?

Pam: "Please comma over today!"



The Punctuation Marks

At the end

The period, question mark and exclamation point all come at the end of a sentence. They tell the reader about the writer's or speaker's tone of voice.

 The **period** shows the writer is making a simple statement. "Ali did her homework as soon as she got home."



 The **question mark** is exactly what it sounds like:



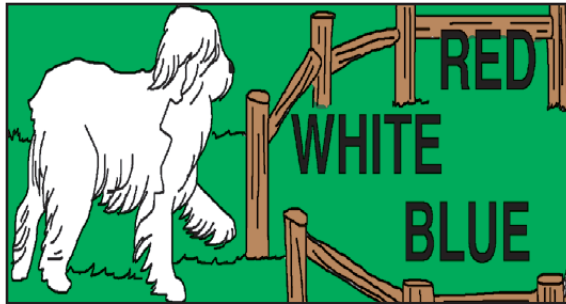
It shows someone is asking a question. "Ali, have you done your homework yet?"

 The **exclamation point** shows somebody is surprised or excited. "Yahoo! I am all done with my homework!"



Next week The Mini Page is about firefighters battling wildfires.

Look through the articles and ads in your newspaper. Pick a few sentences. How does the meaning change if you change the punctuation?



The important little comma

 "The comma is the most important mark, after the period," Lynne said. "I like to think of it as a helpful sheepdog, rounding up the words that go together, and penning them safely away from the words that would confuse things."

"I think of the comma as a little red flag planted in the sentence at the right spot to say, 'Hey, pay attention here. This sentence is doing more than you might think.'"



Lynne said, "The simplest use of the comma is in a list." For example, "The colors of the flag are red, white, and blue."



The colon and semicolon

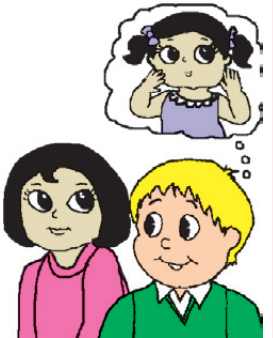
The colon and semicolon "are very useful marks," Lynne said. "Even more than the comma, they say, 'Stop here a minute and look around.' Both of them are ways of joining bits of a sentence."

 With a colon, the second part of the sentence explains the first part. For example, "Becky couldn't speak: She was so shy."



 A semicolon links two thoughts together. For example, "I remember

Becky when she was little; now she's so grown-up."



The apostrophe

 Apostrophes are used to show words are possessive, as in "the cat's paws," (one cat) or "the dogs' leashes" (two or more dogs). (They are **not** used to make words plural.)

Apostrophes are also used to show letters have been taken out of a word, as in "don't" instead of "do not."



The dogs like my dad.



The dog's like my dad.

The Mini Page Staff

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Read all about punctuation

in
The Mini Page®

Distributed by Universal Press Syndicate

by Betty Debnam

Appearing in your newspaper on _____.

from The Mini Page
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(Note to Editor: Above is camera-ready, one column-by-3 1/2-inch ad promoting Issue 38.)

release dates: September 19-25

38-5 (09)

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Standards Spotlight: Punctuation Matters

Mini Page activities meet many state and national educational standards. Each week we identify standards that relate to The Mini Page's content and offer activities that will help your students reach them.

This week's standard:

- Students apply knowledge of language conventions, e.g., punctuation. (Language Arts)

Activities:

- Write a question mark at the top of a piece of paper. Turn five newspaper headlines into questions. Write them on the paper.
- Race with a friend to find punctuation in news stories: period, comma, semi-colon, question mark, exclamation mark.
- Describe the action in a comic strip, but don't use punctuation. Ask a friend to put in punctuation.
- Which punctuation mark (a) shows possession, (b) separates items in a series, and (c) links two thoughts?
- Interview friends who text-message a lot. Discuss the punctuation they use in their messages. Have them compare their text punctuation with their school punctuation. Write a paragraph discussing what they say.

(standards by Dr. Sherrye D. Garrett, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi)

Gus Goodsport's Report

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Supersport: Philip Rivers

Height: 6-5 Birthplace: Decatur, Ala. Weight: 228

So Philip Rivers might not have a "classic" throwing motion. So what! Just put him at quarterback, and his teams win. It happened at his high school in Alabama. It happened in his four years at North Carolina State. And it has happened in his three seasons as a starter with the San Diego Chargers.

Since taking over as the No. 1 QB in 2006, Rivers has posted a 25-7 record as a starter and led the Chargers to three straight AFC West titles. In 2008 he posted the top quarterback rating (105.5) in the National Football League while passing for 4,009 yards and 34 touchdowns.

The son of a high school coach, Rivers has a high football IQ. Tall, tough and talented, he dissects defenses, sees the open receiver and finds ways to win.

Rivers is more than an elite quarterback, however. He's a devoted family man, and founded a charity — the Rivers of Hope Foundation — that helps place foster children in stable homes.

Now he's back on the field, ready to give the Chargers stability at quarterback once again.

(Note to Editor: Above is the Standards for Issue 38.)

(Note to Editor: Above is copy block for Page 3, Issue 38, to be used in place of ad if desired.)