

III. PUNCTUATION AND CAPITALIZATION

III B, b - Uses standard practice for punctuation

COMMAS

Commas signal a slight pause. They are used to set off dependent clauses and long introductory word groups. They are also used to separate items in a series. They are used to set off nonessential material that interrupts the flow of the sentence, and they separate independent clauses joined by conjunctions.

Error: *After I complete my work at this university I plan to work in New York.*

Problem: A comma is needed after an introductory dependent word-group containing a subject and verb.

Correction: *After I complete my work at this university, I plan to work in New York.*

Error: *I bought wrapped and mailed three presents today.*

Problem: Items in a series should be separated with commas. Although the comma before the word *and* is sometimes considered optional, it is often necessary to clarify the meaning.

Correction: *I bought, wrapped, and mailed three presents today.*

Error: *He was a talented composer but he is chiefly remembered for his singing ability.*

Problem: A comma is needed before a conjunction that joins two independent clauses (complete sentences).

Correction: *He was a talented composer, but he is chiefly remembered for his singing ability.*

Error: *This occurrence is I think typical of what can happen when a program has not been properly prepared.*

Problem: Commas are needed between nonessential words or words that interrupt the main clause.

Correction: *This occurrence is, I think, typical of what can happen if a program is not properly prepared.*

SEMICOLONS AND COLONS

Semicolons are used to separate two or more closely related independent sentences. They are also used to separate items in a series containing commas. Colons are used to introduce lists and to emphasize what follows. *Note: A complete sentence must precede the colon and the material that follows.*

Error: *I studied hard all semester, I received straight A's.*

Problem: A comma alone cannot separate two independent clauses. Instead a semicolon is needed to separate two closely related sentences.

Correction: *I studied hard all semester; I received straight A's.*

Error: *Storms simultaneously struck San Francisco, California, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Buffalo, New York.*

Problem: Semicolons are needed to separate items in a series that already contains commas.

Correction: *Storms simultaneously struck San Francisco, California; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Buffalo, New York.*

Error: *Papers will receive the following ratings. 4 for above average, 3 for average, 2 for below average, and 1 for failing.*

Problem: A colon is needed to emphasize the information or a list that follows.

Correction: *Papers will receive the following ratings: 4 for above average, 3 for average, 2 for below average, and 1 for failing.*

Error: *The car show included: vintage Corvettes, antique Rolls Royces, and turn-of-the-century motorcycles.*

Problem: The material preceding the colon and the list that follows is not a complete sentence. Do not separate a verb (or preposition) from the object.

Correction: *The car show included vintage Corvettes, antique Rolls Royces, and turn-of-the-century motorcycles.*

OR

The car show included the following: vintage Rolls Royces, and turn-of-the-century motorcycles.

APOSTROPHES

Apostrophes are used to show either contractions or possession.

Error: *He shouldnt be allowed to participate in the program.*

Problem: An apostrophe is needed in a contraction in place of the omitted letter.

Correction: *He shouldn't be allowed to participate in the program.*

Error: *My brothers car was badly damaged in the accident.*

Problem: An apostrophe is needed to show possession.

Correction: *My brother's car was badly damaged in the accident.*

(Note: The use of the apostrophe before the letter s means that there is just one brother. The plural form would read the following way: My brothers' car was badly damaged in the accident.)

Error: *The players new uniforms arrived after the tournament.*

Problem: An apostrophe is needed to show possession.

Correction: *The players' new uniforms arrived after the tournament.*

(Note: The apostrophe after the letter s means that there is more than one player. If just one player was being referred to in this sentence, then the apostrophe would come before the s as in the following sentence: The player's new uniforms arrived after the tournament.)

Error: *Children laughter could be heard everywhere.*

Problem: An apostrophe and the letter s are needed in this sentence to show whose laughter it is.

Correction: *Children's laughter could be heard everywhere.*

(Note: Because the word children is already plural, the apostrophe and s must be added afterward to show ownership.)

CAPITALIZATION

Capital letters are used to indicate specific names of people, places, buildings, companies, courses, products, holidays, days of the week, months, and major sections of the country and the world. Capital letters are also used to signal the start of a sentence and of a direct quotation.

Error: *Tony went to Dr. Carson for treatment since his own Doctor was away.*

Problem: The use of capital letters with *Tony* and *Dr. Carson* is correct since they are specific (proper) names; the title *Dr.* is also capitalized. However, the word *doctor* is not a specific name and should not be capitalized.

(*Note:* One of the few exceptions is the word *President* in reference to the President of the United States.)

Correction: *Tony went to Dr. Carson for treatment since his own doctor was away.*

Error: *Our Spring break does not start until next monday.*

Problem: Days of the week are capitalized, but seasons are not capitalized.

Correction: *Our spring break does not start until next Monday.*

Error: *The graduate student from japan who taught us computer science 6309 last term spoke english very well.*

Problem: Languages and the names of countries are always capitalized. Courses are also capitalized when they refer to a specific course; they are not capitalized when they refer to courses in general.

(*Note:* The number after a course frequently signals a specific name.)

Correction: *The graduate student from Japan who taught us Computer Science 6309 last semester spoke English very well.*

- Error:** *All the national parks are beautiful, but Rocky Mountain national park is my favorite.*
- Problem:** The first reference to national parks is general and does not need capitalizing. The second reference is part of the specific name and does need capitalizing.
- Correction:** *All the national parks are beautiful, but Rocky Mountain National Park is my favorite.*
- Error:** *Our visitors from England enjoyed their tour throughout the south.*
- Problem:** Major sections of the country are capitalized. (*Note: Simple directions are not capitalized. We traveled further south into Peru.*)
- Correction:** *Our visitors from England enjoyed their tour throughout the South.*

QUOTATION MARKS

Use double quotation marks to enclose a direct quotation and to enclose the title of an article, an essay, a poem, or a short story.

Error: *Shakespeare ironically puts in Polonius's mouth, To thine own self be true.*

Problem: Double quotation marks are needed to set off the quotation.

Correction: *Shakespeare ironically puts in Polonius's mouth, "To thine own self be true."*

Error: *In the article Application of Heat Pipes in Home Air Conditioning, published in the American Society of Heating and Air Conditioning Journal, authors Patricia Elwood and Martina Colombo set new standards for design application.*

Problem: Double quotation marks are needed to set off the title of an article.

Correction: *In the article "Application of Heat Pipes in Home Air Conditioning," published in the American Society of Heating and Air Conditioning Journal, authors Patricia Elwood and Martina Colombo set new standards for design application.*

Error: *In the poem Miss Rosie, Lucille Clifton celebrates the inner beauty of womanhood.*

Problem: Use double quotations to set off the title of a short poem.

Correction: *In the poem "Miss Rosie," Lucille Clifton celebrates the inner beauty of womanhood.*

punctuation and capitalization are tested in sentences tied to a passage.

1. The court clearly stated, We find that real property precedent allows for an easement across Plaintiff's property.
 - A. "We find that real property precedent allows for an easement across Plaintiff's property.
 - B. "We find that real property precedent allows for an easement across Plaintiff's property."
 - C. 'We find that real property precedent allows for an easement across Plaintiff's property.'
 - D. No change is necessary.

The double quotation marks are needed to enclose a direct quotation, as used in Option B. Option A uses quotation marks only at the beginning of the quote; Option C incorrectly uses single quotation marks.

2. In the gothic poem "The Raven," Edgar Allen Poe uses
A B
alliteration to create a rhythmic momentum that builds to the
poem's conclusion.
C
 - A. "gothic"
 - B. The Raven
 - C. conclusion."
 - D. No change is necessary.

The sentence is correct as written, so Option D is the answer. In Option A, the word *gothic* does not need to be enclosed in quotation marks as it is not quoted directly. In Option B, the title of the poem needs double quotation marks. In Option C, the quotation mark after *conclusion* must be deleted because the whole sentence is not a quote.

8. In her first essay, "Growing up Reading," Alfreda Johnston explains how her
A, B
childhood was enriched by the books on her grandmother's shelf.
C
- A. Growing up Reading,
B. Growing up Reading,
C. grandmothers
D. No change is necessary.
9. "Elementary, my dear Watson" is probably not what Sherlock Holmes actually
A, B
said but we enjoy the saying nevertheless.
C
- A. "Elementary," my dear Watson"
B. "Elementary" my dear Watson
C. said, but
D. No change is necessary.
10. Jonathan Swift's essay A Modest Proposal continues to amuse and enlighten
A B
students in the twentieth century.
C
- A. Jonathan Swifts
B. "A Modest Proposal"
C. the Twentieth Century
D. No change is necessary.

ANSWER KEY: PRACTICE EXERCISE FOR CAPITALIZATION AND PUNCTUATION

1. C In the sentence, the word *this* indicates the singular possessive *community's* is correct. In Option A, the name of the organization should be capitalized. However, in Option B the general noun *organization* is not capitalized.
2. A In Option A, the *Middle East* is capitalized as the name of a particular area of the world. In Option B, the comma, not the semicolon, should separate a dependent clause from the main clause. In Option C, the *Sphinx* is capitalized as a proper name.
3. D No change is necessary. In Option A, the comma is necessary after a long introductory phrase. In Option B, the general noun *freshmen* does not need capitalization. In Option C, the colon is not necessary. Remember that a complete sentence must precede the colon and the clarification that follows.
4. B The restrictive clause *who have difficulty with algebra* should not be set off by commas because it explains what kind of students should seek help. Option A deletes the unnecessary colon after *should*, and Option C uses only one comma.
5. B The semicolon is used to join two independent clauses with the adverb *however*. In Option A, the commas in a series are necessary. In Option C, the comma, not the semicolon, is needed after the introductory phrase.
6. C The apostrophe is needed to indicate the contraction of *it is*. In Option A, the double quotation marks are needed to set off the quotation. Option B requires the comma and the coordinating conjunction to join two independent clauses.
7. A Option A eliminates the unnecessary colon before the word *because*. In Option B, the comma is not necessary. In Option C, the semicolon creates a fragment.
8. D No change is necessary because titles of essays are enclosed by double quotation marks and the possessive singular *grandmother's* is correct.
9. C Option C places a comma before the coordinating conjunction *but* to join two independent clauses. In Options A and B, the entire quotation must be enclosed by double quotation marks, and a comma sets off a direct address.
10. B Titles of essays are enclosed by double quotation marks. Option A needs the possessive *Swift's*. Option C incorrectly capitalizes the century.

**CULMINATING EXERCISE: CAPITALIZATION, APOSTROPHES, SEMICOLONS,
COLONS, COMMAS, AND QUOTATION MARKS**

DIRECTIONS: The passage below contains several errors. Read the passage. Then answer each test item by choosing the option that corrects an error in the underlined portion(s). Refer to the passage as necessary. No more than one underlined error will appear in each item. If no error exists, choose "No change is necessary."

In the years following world war II, America experienced unprecedented economic growth, and with that came the ever-increasing move from the old cities to the clean, neat suburbs. The upwardly mobile 1950s families seeking green lawns and lower taxes fled the cities and left little tax base for renewal, renovation, and reconstruction. By the 1960s, the resulting decline of urban areas was visible: in the blight of empty warehouses, decaying tenement houses, and miles of abandoned neighborhoods. By the 1970s, however, the exodus to the suburbs slowed as the children of those, who had fled the urban blight for suburban comfort, sought to recover the charm of the once-grand city buildings. In the Soho area of New York City, for example, artists converted old warehouses into sunlight studios, thus, what had been a haven for derelicts found new life. By the 1980s, from Boston to Seattle, minivans and baby carriages were parked beside renovated brownstones; whose values soared with the return of the affluent young professionals. According to the article "From Blight to Urban Bliss" in *Urban Life*, "A cities' increased tax base can provide revenue for new roads, sewage systems, and police protection."

1. In the years following world war II, America experienced unprecedented economic growth, and with that came the ever-increasing move from the old cities to the clean, neat suburbs.
- A
B
C
- A. World War II
B. growth and
C. from: the
D. No change is necessary.

2. The upwardly mobile 1950s families seeking green lawns and lower taxes fled the cities and left little tax base for renewal, renovation, and reconstruction.
- A. families seeking green lawns and lower taxes;
 B. families seeking green lawns and lower taxes:
 C. families seeking green lawns, and lower taxes
 D. No change is necessary.
3. By the 1960s, the resulting decline of urban areas was visible: in the blight of empty warehouses, decaying tenement houses, and miles of abandoned neighborhoods.
- A. By the 1960s',
 B. visible in
 C. warehouses decaying
 D. No change is necessary.
4. By the 1970s, however, the exodus to the suburbs slowed as the children of those, who had fled the urban blight for suburban comfort, sought to recover the charm of the once-grand city buildings.
- A. however;
 B. Exodus
 C. those who had fled the urban blight for suburban comfort
 D. No change is necessary.
5. In the Soho area of New York City, for example, artists converted old warehouses into sunlight studios, thus, what had been a haven for derelicts found new life.
- A. soho
 B. artists'
 C. studios: thus.
 D. No change is necessary.

6. By the 1980s, from Boston to Seattle, minivans and baby carriages were parked
beside renovated brownstones; whose values soared with the return of the affluent
young professionals.
- A
B
C
- A. Minivans
B. brownstones, whose
C. affluent, young professionals
D. No change is necessary.
7. According to the article "From Blight to Urban Bliss" in *Urban Life*, "A cities'
increased tax base can provide revenue for new roads, sewage systems, and police
protection."
- A
B
C
- A. From Blight to Urban Bliss
B. city's
C. sewage systems; and
D. No change is necessary.

ANSWER KEY: CULMINATING EXERCISE

1. A The name of the war should be capitalized. Option B incorrectly eliminates the comma before the coordinating conjunction *and* joining two independent clauses. Option C adds an unnecessary colon after the preposition *from*.
2. D No change is necessary because no punctuation is needed with the restrictive phrase *seeking green lawns and lower taxes*.
3. B Option B removes the unnecessary colon after the word *visible*. In Option A, the apostrophe is not needed after the *s* in *1960s*. In Option C, the comma is necessary to separate items in a series.
4. C In Option A, commas should surround the adverb *however*. In Option B, the word *exodus* is not capitalized because it is not used as a proper name. Option C correctly removes the commas around the restrictive clause *who had fled the urban blight for suburban comfort*.
5. C In Option C, the semicolon correctly joins two independent clauses. In Option A, the word *Soho* is capitalized as the name of a particular area. In Option B, the apostrophe is unnecessary because the word *artists* does not show possession.
6. B Option B correctly places the comma after *brownstones* separating the nonrestrictive relative clause. In Option A, the common noun *minivans* requires no capitalization. In Option C, the comma is not necessary to separate *affluent* from the noun phrase it modifies *young professionals*.
7. B The possessive singular of *city* is *city's*. In Option A, the quotation marks are needed around the title of an article. A comma, not a semicolon, before the *and* is necessary in a series of phrases in Option C.