

English for Academic Purposes



The Center for Professional Communication

Guide to Icons:



Discussion Activity



Writing Activity



Editing Tip



Good Example: Reader/writer communication



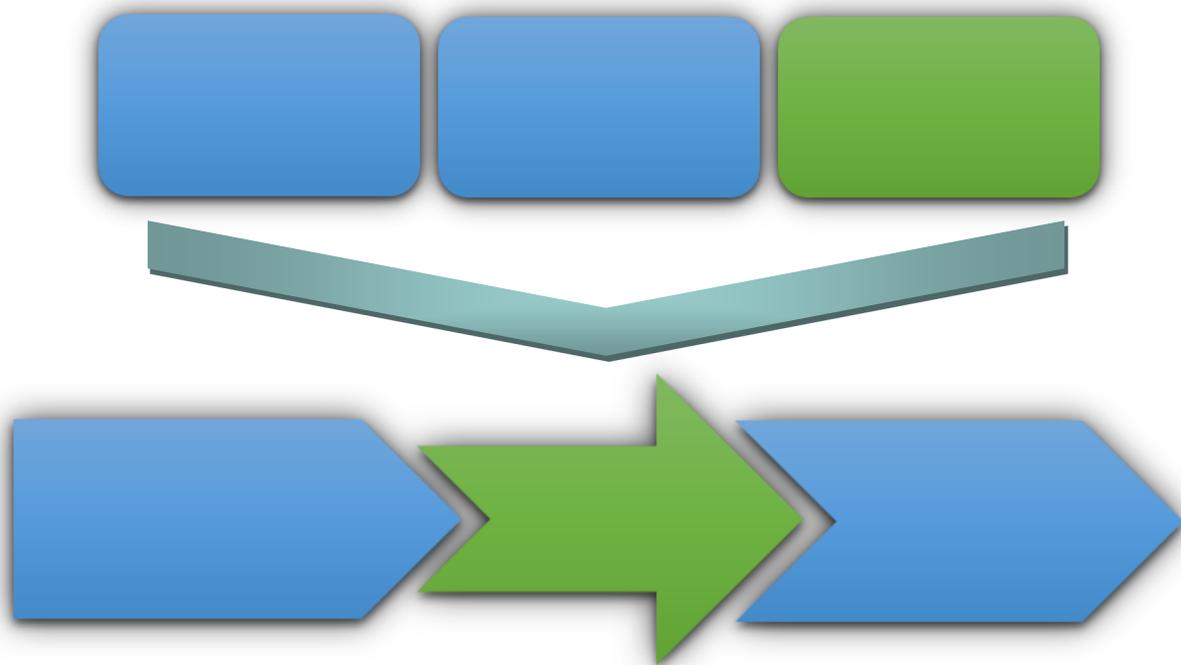
Bad Example: Reader/writer communication



Detour to Vocabulary Building

Unit 2:

Constructing Sentences and Joining Ideas



DISCUSSION



What is the maximum length of an English sentence?
What do you think is the message of the picture above?

WHY BUILD LONGER SENTENCES?

When writing academic texts in English, the writer must make every effort to ensure that the information is presented as clearly as is possible for the reader. This clarity can be achieved through many techniques; in this unit we will look at some of those techniques.



Question

What is the purpose of punctuation?

! Academic writing is a very dense variety of writing; it contains a lot of information in a relatively short space. In order for the academic writer to facilitate the reader's comprehension of this dense information, he or she must employ every tool at his or her disposal. One such tool is punctuation: periods (.), commas (,), colons (:), semi-colons (;), dashes (- and —), parentheses (), brackets ([]), double (“) and single (‘) quotation marks, and question marks (?)—exclamation marks (!) are almost never used in academic writing.



Punctuation: Activity 1



Look at the introductory paragraph above. What punctuation marks were used and why were they used?

Mark	Reason for use

Discuss in pairs or a group:



Are there any punctuation marks that you are unsure how to use? Which ones?

THE PERIOD OR FULL STOP



The period signals to your reader that the idea in your sentence is finished. The next sentence will begin a new idea.

Ideals of beauty have changed a great deal throughout history. There are many reasons for these changes. One such reason is the changes in nutrition. Nutrition can affect the body in terms of bone structure. Good bone structure results in symmetry in facial features. Poor bone structure results in a lack of facial feature symmetry. Therefore, as nutrition has changed the shape of human faces through history, ideals of beauty have changed too.

Using too many periods can make your paragraph “choppy.” This means that the ideas in your sentences are not linked together smoothly. Your reader may not be able to follow your logic in the paragraph because the connection between your sentences is not clear.

THE COMMA



The comma communicates to your reader that the two clauses are one idea and should be understood together, not separately.

Ideals of beauty have changed a great deal throughout history, and there are many reasons for these changes, and one such reason is the changes in nutrition because nutrition can affect the body in terms of bone structure, and good bone structure results in symmetry in facial features, but poor bone structure results in a lack of facial feature symmetry, so, as nutrition has changed the shape of human faces through history, ideals of beauty have changed, too.

Using too many commas can make your paragraph confusing for your reader by overloading them with information. Your reader may find it difficult to follow your logic because they cannot process all of the information at the same time.

Good academic writers use a combination of punctuation marks to help the reader to understand the text, the degree of connection between ideas, and the writer's intended meaning.



Ideals of beauty have changed a great deal throughout history. There are many reasons for these changes, and one such reason is the changes in nutrition. Nutrition can affect the body in terms of bone structure. Good bone structure results in symmetry in facial features, but poor bone structure results in a lack of facial feature symmetry. Therefore, as nutrition has changed the shape of human faces through history, ideals of beauty have changed too.

But what should you do when you have two ideas that are not different enough to use a period and not similar enough to use a comma?

THE SEMICOLON



A semicolon allows you to control the relationship between your ideas so that your reader understands that the ideas are not 100% separate, but they are also not 100% the same. A semicolon is used when you want to continue the same idea in another sentence.

1. *Good bone structure results in symmetry in facial features. Poor bone structure results in a lack of facial feature symmetry.*
2. *Good bone structure results in symmetry in the facial features, but poor bone structure results in a lack of symmetry in facial features.*
3. *Good bone structure results in symmetry in the facial features; poor bone structure results in a lack of symmetry in facial features.*

Or

Good bone structure results in symmetry in the facial features; however, poor bone structure results in a lack of symmetry in facial features.



From the above examples, we can see that the semicolon is another tool that the writer can use to better communicate his or her ideas to the reader. Of course, semicolons are used far more rarely than periods and commas; however, if used well, they can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the writing and the reader’s understanding of the ideas that you are trying to express.

A good opportunity for a writer to begin experimenting with the use of a semicolon is before words such as *however* and *therefore*. These words signal a very close relationship between the ensuing sentence and the sentence that has come before and, thus, provide an ideal opportunity to employ a semicolon.

Other words that often follow a semicolon are as follows:

- ; in addition,
- ; moreover,
- ; furthermore,
- ; nevertheless,
- ; consequently,
- ; as a result,

THREE DEGREES OF SEPARATION

Separation of ideas	Punctuation
<p>Maximum</p> <p>Slows down the reader and prepares them for a new idea.</p>	<p>Period (.)</p>
<p>Medium</p> <p>Slows down the reader and lets them know that the next idea is closely related to the previous idea.</p>	<p>Semicolon (;)</p>
<p>Minimum</p> <p>Lets the reader know that these two ideas should be taken together as one idea.</p>	<p>Comma (,)</p>



Look at the ideas below and decide which punctuation mark you should use to join sentence a) & b).

IMPORTANT: YOU CAN CHANGE THE WORDS, THE ORDER OF THE WORDS, AND THE LENGTH OF THE SENTENCE TO SUIT YOUR PUNCTUATION DECISION.

- a) People’s impression of what is and is not attractive is influenced by many factors.
- b) People’s impression of what is and is not attractive depends on their culture.

- a) Some people consider tanned skin to be very attractive.
- b) Some people consider pale skin to be attractive.

- a) A person’s perceived attractiveness can impact their lives in many ways.
- b) One way a person’s perceived attractiveness can impact their lives is in their careers.

- a) Attractiveness is considered important by many people.
- b) Some people do not consider attractiveness to be a priority.

There are some rules to the use of commas and semicolons.

A simple sentence contains a subject and a verb. This is referred to as an independent clause.



Ideals of beauty have changed a great deal throughout history.

We can join two independent clauses using a comma and a conjunction (and, but, etc.)



Ideals of beauty have changed a great deal throughout history, and there are many reasons for these changes.

If we do not use a conjunction in the above sentence, it is known as a comma splice (a kind of run-on sentence). This is grammatically incorrect.



Ideals of beauty have changed a great deal throughout history, there are many reasons for these changes.

We can also join two independent clauses with a semicolon.



Ideals of beauty have changed a great deal throughout history; there are many reasons for these changes.

But we cannot join them if the second clause is not a full sentence (independent clause).



Ideals of beauty have changed a great deal throughout history, and there are many reasons for these changes; such as nutrition.

For sentences such as the above example, we should use a comma.

Commas mark a) interruptions in sentences, b) introductory phrases, c) items in a list (even before *and*), and d) additional information beginning with *-ing*.

- The policy was, therefore, a success.
- After a two-year suspension, the policy was reintroduced.
- The ministries affected were the MOF, the MOE, and the MOFA.
- The policy had little impact, leading to a reevaluation of the entire project.



THE COLON



The colon is used to provide more details about what was just said such as examples or explanations. When a reader sees a colon, the reader expects you to elaborate on the idea in the previous sentence. Whereas the semicolon links two related ideas, the colon links the same idea said in another way or subcategories of a category mentioned in the first sentence. This distinction is a source of debate among many writers.

Listing

Colons are used to introduce lists. This fact is known to most writers; however, there are some rules governing its use: Only use a colon to introduce a list after a complete sentence (independent clause). Although a complete sentence is any sentence that includes a subject and a predicate (verb or verb +), you should avoid using a colon after a verb or a preposition.

Examples



I will bring: flowers and chocolates.



I will bring the following: flowers and chocolates.



I will bring flowers and chocolates.

Punctuation: Activity 3



Choose between a colon and a semicolon

- 1) The impact of the policy was clear / / it was not a success.
- 2) The Ministry of Finance supported the idea / / the Ministry of Education did not.
- 3) There were three main benefits to this policy / / it was cheaper, more efficient, and more popular with voters.
- 4) There were three main benefits to this policy / / cost, efficacy, and popularity.



1. Punctuate the following paragraph in such a way as to make the meaning as clear as possible for the reader.

Commercial whaling has been and remains a controversial issue and sticking point for international relations this controversy is especially notable in the heated discourse among countries located near the Pacific Ocean Australia for example opposes commercial and scientific whaling while Japan considers scientific whaling a right and commercial whaling a tradition to be protected unfortunately these opposing views have not been reconciled despite efforts by the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) ICRW debates generally focus on the same recurring differences in the positions of Japan and other nations the usefulness of scientific whaling and the proposed continuation of a moratorium on whaling Morishita (2006) for example reviews the whaling issue from the Japanese perspective discussing resource management and political economic and cultural perspectives and suggesting options for progress Clapham Childerhouse Nicolas Rojas-Bracho Tillman and Brown (2007) respond to Morishita's paper arguing in favor of regulation of the whaling industry

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RELATIVE CLAUSES

Relative clauses can help the writer insert pertinent information into a sentence. Through word choice and the use of punctuation, the writer can prepare the reader for this inserted information. Similar to the uses of punctuation we saw previously, these relative clauses (or adjective clauses) can help a writer group connected ideas together so that the writing is better organized and easier to consume for the reader. Let's look again at our GEI data.

Table1.

Female Education, Labor Force Participation, and GEI Rank

Country	% of female population with at least some secondary education (aged 25 or above)	Labor force participation rate (% aged 15 or above)	GEI rank
Tanzania	5.6	88.1	124
Burundi	5.2	83.2	104
Burkina Faso	0.9	77.1	133
Iran	62.2	23.4	109
Jordan	69.5	15.3	101
Luxembourg	100	50.7	29
Germany	97	53.5	3
Norway	97.4	61.5	9
Slovenia	95.8	52.3	1

Note. Data taken from the Gender Equality Index (GEI, United Nations Development Program, 2014).

There are three pieces of information presented about each country. We, therefore, have a number of ways to organize this information in our writing.

THREE SENTENCES



In Tanzania, 5.6% of the female population has at least some secondary education. The labor force participation rate of women aged 15 or above is 88.1%. Tanzania's GEI rank is 124th.

COMPOUND SENTENCES



Tanzania educates about 5.6% of its female population to at least some secondary education level and has a female labor force participation rate of 88.1%, but its GEI ranking is 124th.

OTHER PUNCTUATION MARKS AND/OR COMPLEX SENTENCES



Although Tanzania has a female labor force participation rate of 88.1%, only 5.6% of its female population have at least some secondary education; therefore, Tanzania's GEI ranking remains low at 124th.

The above three example sentences are just some ways that we could express the information about a particular country reported in the table. Another way common in academic writing is the use of relative clauses.

Relative clauses are sections of information inserted into another sentence. The writer may use certain words and punctuation to signal that a relative clause is beginning and what kind of clause the reader should expect.

RELATIVE CLAUSE SIGNALS

Word	Signal
That	Signals that what follows is a defining clause and could not be omitted from the sentence without losing the core meaning of the sentence (US English/APA).

Example



The countries **that benefit most from such FTAs** are often members of the agreement at the highest level of economic development.

Which	Signals that what follows is additional yet pertinent information. The clause will be marked with commas at the start and end (US English/APA).
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Example



The FTA, **which was signed over a decade ago**, has been a source of much debate among economists representing all parties involved.

Who	Signals defining or additional information about a person
Where	Signals defining or additional information about a place
When	Signals defining or additional information about a time

Example



The finance minister is the person **who is responsible for overseeing the signing of such agreements**.



The border towns, **where the FTA has had the greatest economic impact**, support the continuation of the FTA.



This paper presents a theory of trade agreements **where politics plays a central role**.



In 2017, **when the current term of the FTA expires**, the agreement will be reevaluated.

Whom

Signals defining or additional information about a person that is the object of the sentence

Whose

Signals defining or additional information about something belonging to someone or something

Why

Signals defining information about a reason

Examples



The finance minister, **whom many noted economists support**, is in favor of maintaining the status quo.



Richter, **whose theories have since been strongly disputed**, claimed that FTA with more developed countries were a necessary part of the development process.



Many researchers have claimed that this imbalance in benefits garnered from FTAs is **the reason why so many proposed FTAs never proceed past the negotiation stages**.

Notes

You can also add numbers and quantifiers to relative pronouns (that's, who, whom, whose, which, and whose)

(e.g., One of which or many of whom)

Although it is possible to omit some relative pronouns or relative adverbs (when, where, and why), in formal academic writing they are usually left in.



Go back to the paragraph/s you wrote at the end of unit one. Check the punctuation and look for places to clarify your meaning using punctuation marks and relative clauses.



Think back on what you have learned in this unit. Are there any areas that you are still not clear on? What do you think was the most useful thing you learned from this unit?

Vocabulary Builder

The following words appear throughout this unit and are from the Academic Word List. They will be important for writing and reading academic texts written in English. Fill out the form by adding in the related words.

Keyword	Keyword type	Noun form	Verb form	Adjective form	Adverb form	Opposite by prefix
Comprehension						
e.g.						
Controversy						
e.g.						
Dense						
e.g.						
Discourse						
e.g.						

Vocabulary Builder

Keyword	Keyword type	Noun form	Verb form	Adjective form	Adverb form	Opposite by prefix
Economist						
e.g.						
Effectiveness						
e.g.						
Facilitate						
e.g.						
Semi						
e.g.						
Separation						
e.g.						