

Punctuation: Commas, Parentheses, and Dashes

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: _____ / 10



Quick Review

Extra information that can be lifted OUT of a sentence without changing its core meaning is called NONRESTRICTIVE or PARENTHETICAL. Set it off with one of three marks. COMMAS are neutral and most common (My sister, who is a doctor, lives in Atlanta). PARENTHESES make the aside quieter and more optional (The book, which I borrowed last week, is overdue → The book (which I borrowed last week) is overdue). EM DASHES make the aside louder and more emphatic (The book — which everyone loves — is overdue). Information that IDENTIFIES which one you mean is RESTRICTIVE and takes NO commas (The book that I borrowed is overdue).

PRACTICE

Choose the correct answer for each question.

- Which sentence is punctuated correctly?
 - My sister who is a doctor lives in Atlanta.
 - My sister, who is a doctor, lives in Atlanta.
 - My sister, who is a doctor lives in Atlanta.
 - My sister who is a doctor, lives in Atlanta.
- Which sentence is punctuated correctly?
 - The book, that I borrowed yesterday, is overdue.
 - The book that I borrowed yesterday, is overdue.
 - The book that I borrowed yesterday is overdue.
 - The book, that I borrowed yesterday is overdue.
- Which sentence correctly sets off the appositive?
 - Jonas Salk the inventor of the polio vaccine saved millions of lives.
 - Jonas Salk, the inventor of the polio vaccine saved millions of lives.
 - Jonas Salk, the inventor of the polio vaccine, saved millions of lives.
 - Jonas Salk the inventor of the polio vaccine, saved millions of lives.
- Which sentence uses PARENTHESES correctly to add a quiet aside?
 - The festival (lasted three days) drew thousands of visitors.
 - The festival, lasted three days, drew thousands of visitors.
 - The festival (which lasted three days) drew thousands of visitors.
 - The festival which lasted three days, drew thousands of visitors.



5. Which sentence uses EM DASHES correctly for emphasis?
- A. The new policy — which the principal announced this morning — surprised everyone.
 - B. The new policy—which the principal announced this morning, surprised everyone.
 - C. The new policy, which the principal announced this morning — surprised everyone.
 - D. The — new policy which the principal announced this morning — surprised everyone.
6. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?
- A. The students, who finished early, may read silently.
 - B. The students who finished early may read silently.
 - C. The students who finished early, may read silently.
 - D. The students, who finished early may read silently.
7. Which sentence uses punctuation correctly?
- A. Ms. Rivera — our science teacher — earned her doctorate last spring.
 - B. Ms. Rivera — our science teacher, earned her doctorate last spring.
 - C. Ms. Rivera, our science teacher — earned her doctorate last spring.
 - D. Ms. Rivera our science teacher — earned her doctorate last spring.
8. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?
- A. The trail, which is steep, dangerous, and poorly marked, is closed today.
 - B. The trail, which is steep, dangerous, and poorly marked is closed today.
 - C. The trail which is steep, dangerous, and poorly marked, is closed today.
 - D. The trail, which is steep dangerous and poorly marked, is closed today.
9. Rewrite this sentence by adding two commas in the correct places: 'My cousin Eleanor who lives in Toronto is visiting next weekend.'
- _____
- _____
10. Write one sentence about a famous person that uses commas to set off a nonrestrictive appositive (a phrase that renames the person).
- _____
- _____



Answer Keys

- 1 A B C D
- 2 A B C D
- 3 A B C D
- 4 A B C D
- 5 A B C D

- 6 A B C D
- 7 A B C D
- 8 A B C D
- 9
- 10

Explanations

1. B	The clause 'who is a doctor' is NONRESTRICTIVE — the speaker has only one sister, so the clause adds extra information rather than identifying which sister. Nonrestrictive clauses are set off with a comma BEFORE and a comma AFTER. A has no commas. C and D each have only one of the two needed commas.
2. C	The clause 'that I borrowed yesterday' is RESTRICTIVE — it identifies WHICH book is overdue out of many possible books. Restrictive clauses take NO commas. The word 'that' (without commas) is the usual signal of a restrictive clause. A wraps it in commas. B and D each insert one wrong comma.
3. C	The phrase 'the inventor of the polio vaccine' is a NONRESTRICTIVE appositive — it renames Jonas Salk but does not identify which Jonas Salk. It needs a comma BEFORE and a comma AFTER. A drops both commas. B and D each include only one of the two needed commas.
4. C	Parentheses set off a complete nonrestrictive element — here the relative clause 'which lasted three days.' A wraps a verb phrase ('lasted three days') in parentheses, breaking the main sentence ('The festival drew thousands'). B places commas around the same verb phrase, which still leaves the main clause without its verb. D drops the opening comma and leaves a comma splice.
5. A	Em dashes used to set off a nonrestrictive element work in PAIRS — one before the aside and one after. A places both dashes correctly around 'which the principal announced this morning.' B uses only an opening dash and mixes it with a closing comma. C mixes a comma with a dash. D places the first dash inside the noun phrase 'new policy,' splitting it for no reason.
6. B	The clause 'who finished early' is RESTRICTIVE — it identifies WHICH students may read (only the ones who finished, not the whole class). Restrictive clauses take NO commas. A wraps the clause in commas, which would mean ALL the students finished early. C and D each leave one stray comma.
7. A	Em dashes used to set off a nonrestrictive appositive must come in a matched pair. A correctly places a dash before AND after 'our science teacher.' B and C each mix a dash with a comma — when you start with one mark, you must close with the same mark. D drops the opening dash entirely.
8. A	Two rules apply at once. The relative clause 'which is steep, dangerous, and poorly marked' is nonrestrictive and is set off with a comma BEFORE and AFTER. Inside that clause, the three adjectives form a series and need commas (including the Oxford comma). B drops the closing comma of the nonrestrictive clause. C drops the opening comma. D drops the series commas.



9.	<p>Answer: My cousin Eleanor, who lives in Toronto, is visiting next weekend.</p> <p>The clause 'who lives in Toronto' is nonrestrictive — it adds extra information about a specific cousin (Eleanor) who has already been named. Set the clause off with a comma BEFORE 'who' and a comma AFTER 'Toronto.' Without both commas, the sentence reads as if it were identifying which cousin out of many.</p>
10.	<p>Answer: Sample answer: Marie Curie, the first woman to win a Nobel Prize, discovered two new elements.</p> <p>A nonrestrictive appositive renames the noun it follows and is set off with a comma before AND a comma after. The sample sets off 'the first woman to win a Nobel Prize' with two commas. Any sentence that names a person, follows the name with a renaming phrase wrapped in two commas, and finishes the main idea is correct.</p>



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