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.

1. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

A. My sister who is a doctor lives in Atlanta.

B. My sister, who is a doctor, lives in Atlanta.

C. My sister, who is a doctor lives in Atlanta.

D. My sister who is a doctor, lives in Atlanta.

2. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

A. The book, that I borrowed yesterday, is overdue.

B. The book that I borrowed yesterday, is overdue.

C. The book that I borrowed yesterday is overdue.

D. The book, that I borrowed yesterday is overdue.

3. Which sentence correctly sets off the appositive?

A. Jonas Salk the inventor of the polio vaccine saved millions of lives.

B. Jonas Salk, the inventor of the polio vaccine saved millions of lives.

C. Jonas Salk, the inventor of the polio vaccine, saved millions of lives.

D. Jonas Salk the inventor of the polio vaccine, saved millions of lives.

4. Which sentence uses PARENTHESES correctly to add a quiet aside?

A. The festival (lasted three days) drew thousands of visitors.

B. The festival, lasted three days, drew thousands of visitors.

C. The festival (which lasted three days) drew thousands of visitors.

D. 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	6	A	**B**	C	D
2	A	B	**C**	D	7	**A**	B	C	D
3	A	B	**C**	D	8	**A**	B	C	D
4	A	B	**C**	D	9	See below			
5	**A**	B	C	D	10	See below			

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.	**Answer:** My cousin Eleanor, who lives in Toronto, is visiting next weekend. 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.
10.	**Answer:** Sample answer: Marie Curie, the first woman to win a Nobel Prize, discovered two new elements. 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.

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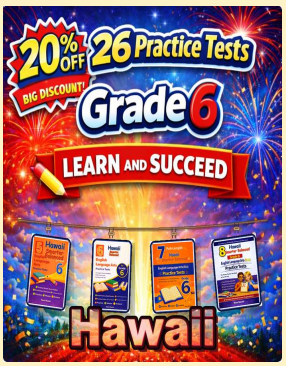

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