

# 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.'

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- 10. Write one sentence about a famous person that uses commas to set off a nonrestrictive appositive (a phrase that renames the person).

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## 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


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|-------------|--|
| <b>1. B</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.   |
| <b>2. C</b> | 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.   |
| <b>3. C</b> | 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.  |
| <b>4. C</b> | 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. |
| <b>5. A</b> | 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.            |
| <b>6. B</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.  |
| <b>7. A</b> | 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.  |
| <b>8. A</b> | 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.             |



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| 9.  | <p><b>Answer:</b> 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><b>Answer:</b> 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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