

Getting out of Writer's Jail



Commas, parentheses, and dashes are the keys to getting out of simple sentence jail. If you only write basic five-word sentences, you are locked into writing that sounds choppy. Readers will be drawn into your writing if you mix up the structures and lengths of your sentences because it creates rhythm. Great writers use punctuation that helps them pack additional details into their sentences! We'll save colons and semicolons for another class, but let's begin with commas, dashes, and parentheses.

1. Commas



- NOTE: This is just one way to use commas. **Commas, tiny and confusing punctuation marks, are used in many different ways.**
- When you want to add details within a sentence, surround the words with commas.
- To test if your sentence is correct, take out the commas and the new words. Does your sentence still make sense and sound good? If so, you did it!

2. Parentheses



- Use sparingly.
- **This is great if you want to add your voice (mine is never quiet) with an aside, thoughts, or humor.**
- I'll show you how to punctuate examples during class.

3. Dashes



- Use sparingly.
- This is MORE dramatic than parentheses.
- With a dash, you are telling the reader something big is coming in the sentence.
- Don't leave spaces between the dash and the words.
- **Don't ever use a hyphen--it's extremely offensive to picky English teachers--in place of a dash for adding more details to a sentence.**
- If there isn't a dash symbol on your keyboard, use two hyphens together.