

The Power of Words

The piece of writing below is by Nelson Mandela. He has used simple sentences and punctuation. His words paint a picture. The punctuation shows us where the pauses should be.

Take a breath for a full stop; pause for a moment at a comma; pause a little longer for a semi-colon (half way between a full stop and a comma)!

Nelson's work shows that language does not have to be complicated in order to be powerful and convey a clear message.

What does he mean? How do you feel about what he has written? Do you understand him?

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way.

But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.

I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come.

But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.

– by Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, born 1918; South African Lawyer, statesman and 1993 Nobel Peace Prize winner. Taken from his inspirational book, 'Long Walk to Freedom', 1994.

Punctuation: Using Commas with added words and phrases

Print this page, then write the following words into the spaces so that the sentences make sense:

however nevertheless apparently unfortunately

1. She is, _____ , very unhappy with her new job.
 2. I hear that, _____ , he was unable to go.
 3. _____ , I couldn't go after all.
 4. I shall, _____ , still continue to shop there.
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Put commas in the right places, to improve understanding:

1. She was it seems a very intelligent woman.
 2. The policeman I understand fell into the hole himself.
 3. My brother however is very good at that sort of thing.
 4. You are apparently the person I need to talk to.
 5. It would seem perhaps to have been a silly thing to do.
 6. Nevertheless I will still pay for the work you have done.
 7. Diamonds which are expensive are often used in weddings rings.
 8. If you have any questions let me know.
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Find your own words or phrases to add into these sentences:

1. My brother, _____ , has gone on holiday early.
2. The hall will close, _____ , at the end of the month.

Punctuation Matters!

When we talk to somebody face to face, we use **intonation** (tone of voice) and we use **pauses** for emphasis. There are also visual signals – our facial expressions, our body language, to help the listener to understand what we are saying.

When we write, there are **no visual or verbal signals**. The only aid we have is **punctuation**. This helps the reader to reconstruct the way we would have spoken the words. They can then imagine our intonation, our pauses and our meaning – the **verbal signals**. That's why it is so important.

Wrong punctuation can change the message totally. Here is a fun example.

Same words + different punctuation = different message:

Dear John, I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy – will you let me be yours? Jane	Dear John, I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men, I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be? Yours, Jane
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Commas

Use **commas** as an aid to understanding. Think of them as a brief pause between thoughts. For example, “If you were speaking the sentence out loud, trying to put your message very clearly, where would you put the commas?”

A comma in the wrong place can change the message. For example:

Our doctor said, the man is drunk. — Our doctor, said the man, is drunk.

Correct punctuation could even save someone's life:

Let's go and eat Paul. — Let's go and eat, Paul. 😊

Examples of Correct Usage:

“The bar was closed, but the customers stayed to watch the television.”

“Because of a flat tyre, the salesman was late for his appointment.”

“For instance, ...”

“For example, ...”

“Certainly, ...”

“In this section, fill in the reason you were absent from work.”

“Monday was her day off, so she went to visit her mother.”

Note: Too many commas in one sentence can be confusing, so could you split a complex sentence into two or three separate sentences? Or is there a better way to say it?