



Legal-Writing Exercises: Part VI — Punctuation (Continued)

In the last issue of the *Journal*, you practiced your legal-writing and punctuation skills by completing exercises on quotations, hyphens, commas, question marks, exclamation points, and periods. This issue, in which the *Legal Writer* will discuss semicolons, colons, parentheses, and apostrophes, continues from the last issue. At the end of each section, you'll be tested on the concepts discussed and tasked with editing the sentences. You may change words, rearrange words, and add or delete words. After you've edited the sentences, go to the answers at the end of the article to see whether you've edited your sentences correctly.

This is the last column in our six-part legal-writing-exercises series. In the next issue of the *Journal*, the *Legal Writer* will begin a multipart series called the Worst Mistakes in Legal Writing.

Semicolons

Semicolons connect major sentence elements with equal grammatical rank. They go between independent clauses and, in the writer's discretion, closely related clauses. The clause after the semicolon either restates the idea expressed in the first clause or expands on, or presents a contrast to, the first clause.

To avoid a run-on comma splice, connect two independent clauses with a semicolon, not a comma. Semicolons join independent clauses linked with transitional expressions. Transitional expressions include conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases. Conjunctive adverbs include *accordingly*, *finally*, *hence*, *however*, *moreover*,

similarly, *therefore*, and *thus*. Transitional phrases include *after all*, *in fact*, *for example*, and *in conclusion*.

A semicolon also goes between items in a series containing internal punctuation. Inserting semicolons between each series makes it easier for readers to distinguish between the major groupings in the sentence.

Semicolons go outside quotation marks.

Exercises: Semicolons

Rewrite the following sentences by replacing commas and periods with semicolons.

1. The court clerk instructed the jury not to speak about the case outside the courtroom, the clerk wanted to protect jury integrity.
2. The judge has traveled to Ottawa, Canada, Tokyo, Japan, and Bucharest, Romania.
3. Many defendants choose Mr. Amato as their attorney in fact, he was the lawyer for every case we had in court today.
4. Some parents deserve full custody of their children others don't.
5. The judge's ruling didn't surprise Margaret, the defendant's lawyer provided beneficial evidence for his client's case.
6. The witness was very professional however his story didn't match those of the other witnesses.
7. The victim is waiting for her brother, from Florida, her sister, from Ohio, and her uncle, from Denver.
8. Most court visits take all day, therefore, you should take off from work for the day.

9. The defendant gave up, he pleaded guilty to all charges.
10. I don't think the witness is an expert, for example, his testimony wasn't relevant to any fact in dispute.

Parentheses

Parentheses are used to clarify, comment on, illustrate, or supplement other information in a sentence. The information within parentheses is usually minor or of secondary importance. Numbers, letters, abbreviations, and acronyms are placed within parentheses, as are citations according to some citation guides and publication information. If a parenthesis appears at the end of a sentence, all punctuation is placed outside the closing parenthesis. If the parentheses contain an independent clause, then the punctuation is placed inside the closing parenthesis.

Parentheses interrupt the text. Use them only when necessary.

Exercises: Parentheses

1. The judge called for a 15-minute recess when he realized that the defendant's lawyer – a boisterous loud – overwhelmed the witness.
2. The Rodriguez family is suing the New York City Police Department, NYPD.
3. Investigators found the remains of Jane Doe (17), who was last seen with her boyfriend on June 14.
4. The dean spoke at three law schools: 1. University at Buffalo School of Law, 2. Albany Law

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School, and 3. Syracuse University College of Law.

5. The witness, a nurse, said she recorded the plaintiff's vital signs, temperature, pulse, and blood pressure, as soon as the plaintiff arrived at the hospital.
6. All who enter the courthouse must go through a magnetometer for security reasons.
7. All electronics, cellphones, cameras, iPads, etc., must be turned off while in the courtroom.
8. Parentheses are usually too informal for legal writing.
9. Criminal Court theft cases are difficult to try.
10. Fordham University School of Law encourages its students and alumni to contribute their time and skill in the service of others.

Colons

A colon calls attention to the words that follow it. It introduces explanations, definitions, examples, series, lists, and quotations. A colon generates excitement. A colon also separates elements such as salutations in formal letters; hours, minutes, and seconds; and ratios. Capitalize the first letter in an independent clause if preceded by a colon. If a dependent clause follows the colon, then don't capitalize the first letter of the word. Colons always go outside quotation marks. Use one space after a colon.

Exercises: Colons

1. The defendant has two charges; possession of a firearm and robbery.
2. The defendant is remaining pro se due to the United States law, "Innocent until proven guilty."
3. The plaintiff is pro se, "on one's own behalf."
4. The case is scheduled to start at 230 p.m.
5. There was a 2 to 1 ratio of females to males in the interning class of summer 2018.

6. The new court attorney has many important qualities; organized, responsible, and patient.
7. According to the witness, the victim said only one thing, "HELP!"
8. Mary Shelley is the author of *Frankenstein, The Modern Prometheus*.
9. The plaintiff had two choices; fight or flee.
10. Never forget this point, think before you speak.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes show ownership or possession. An apostrophe and an s ('s) is added to all singular nouns to show possession, even if the nouns end in s, k, x, or z. If a plural word ends in s, add only an apostrophe (') to show possession. If a plural word doesn't end in s, add an apostrophe and an s ('s) to show possession. It's common to use an apostrophe alone with a singular word ending in s to show possession (Justice Thomas' opinion). This practice is not grammatically incorrect, but the *Legal Writer* suggests using an apostrophe and an s ('s) after singular words that end in s; this form is always correct.

Apostrophes are also used to omit a letter (or letters) in a contraction (although contractions are rarely used in legal writing; they're considered informal). One common error is *it's*. *It's* should only be used when you want to write *it is* or *it has*. To show possession, meaning "belonging to 'it,'" use *its*. Don't confuse contractions with possessive pronouns. Apostrophes aren't used with possessive pronouns such as *yours*, *hers*, *his*, *theirs*, *ours*, *whose*, and *its*.

Exercises: Apostrophes

1. The plaintiff sued. The plaintiffs' witness testified for three hours.
2. Charles' attorney was late for the trial.
3. The judges's interns were at the trial.
4. The mens suits were all black.
5. Judge Rodriguez' ruling remained unquestioned.

6. The court officer shouldn't allow the attorneys near the bench.
7. The law firm held it's annual company meeting last week.
8. Its the first day of trial.
9. The defendant was born in the 1960's.
10. Apostrophe's are confusing.

Now that you've completed the exercises (we hope you didn't peek at the answers!), study the given answers to see whether you edited the sentences correctly. The *Legal Writer* also suggests rereading your writing to practice your skills.

Answers: Semicolons

1. The two sentences are independent clauses that should be joined by a semicolon (or a period). *Corrected Version:* The court clerks instructed the jury not to speak about the case outside the courtroom; they want to assure jury integrity.
2. Because this series contains internal punctuation, use a semicolon to separate them. *Corrected Version:* The judge has traveled to Ottawa, Canada; Tokyo, Japan; and Bucharest, Romania.
3. Semicolons are used between independent clauses linked with a transitional expression. "In fact" (itself a trite and mostly unnecessary expression) is a transitional expression. *Corrected Version:* Many defendants choose Mr. Amato as their attorney; in fact, he was the lawyer for every case we had in court today.
4. The second clause presents a contrast to the first clause; a semicolon should be present. *Corrected Version:* Some parents deserve full custody of their children; others don't.
5. The second clause expands on the idea presented in the first clause. Put a semicolon between them. *Corrected Version:* The judge's ruling didn't surprise Margaret; the defendant's lawyer provided beneficial evidence for his client's case.

6. A semicolon should link independent clauses joined by adverbs like *therefore*, *however*, and *indeed*. Place a semicolon before *however*. *Corrected Version*: The witness was very professional; however, his story didn't match those of the other witnesses. Or begin a new sentence with *however*; or change *however* to *but*.
7. A semicolon is necessary in a series containing internal punctuation. *Corrected Version*: The victim is waiting for her brother, from Florida; her sister, from Ohio; and her uncle, from Denver.
8. Semicolons are used between independent clauses linked with an adverb. *Therefore* is an adverb. *Corrected Version*: Most court visits take all day; therefore, you should take off from work for the day. Or start a new sentence with *therefore*.
9. The second clause expands on the idea presented in the first clause. Place a semicolon between them. *Corrected Version*: The defendant gave up; he pleaded guilty to all charges. Or start a new sentence with "He."
10. Semicolons go between independent clauses linked with transitional expressions. Transitional phrases include *after all*, *in fact*, *for example*, and *in conclusion*. *Corrected Version*: I don't think the witness is an expert; for example, his testimony wasn't relevant to any fact in dispute.

Answers: Parentheses

1. *Corrected Version*: The judge called for a recess (of 15 minutes) when he realized that the defendant's lawyer overwhelmed the witness (if you want to deemphasize "of 15 minutes"). Or put "boisterous lout" inside commas, or inside a parenthetical, if you want to deemphasize those words less than they'd be emphasized inside an em dash.
2. Acronyms must be placed within parentheses. *Corrected Version*: The Rodriguez family is suing the New York City Police Department (NYPD).
3. The parentheses obscure Doe's age. *Corrected Version*: Investigators found the remains of Jane Doe, age 17, who was last seen with her boyfriend on June 14.
4. Numerals should be placed within parentheses. *Corrected Version*: The dean spoke at three law schools: (1) University at Buffalo School of Law, (2) Albany Law School, and (3) Syracuse University College of Law.
5. Vital signs are clarified as "temperature, pulse, and blood pressure." That clause should be placed within parentheses. *Corrected Version*: The witness, a nurse, said she recorded the plaintiff's vital signs (temperature, pulse, and blood pressure) as soon as the plaintiff arrived at the hospital.
6. "For security reasons" comments on what precedes it. Place the clause within parentheses. *Corrected Version*: All who enter the courthouse must go through a magnetometer (for security reasons).
7. The types of electronics should be placed within parentheses because they clarify the sentence. *Corrected Version*: All electronics (cell phones, cameras, iPads, etc.) must be turned off while in the courtroom.
8. In the author's discretion, *usually* may be placed within parentheses because it comments on the statement. *Corrected Version*: Parentheses are (usually) too informal for legal writing.
9. *Theft*, in the writer's discretion, may be put inside parentheses because it describes what kind of criminal act is difficult to try. *Corrected Version*: Criminal court (theft) cases are difficult to try.
10. In the author's discretion, *alumni* may be placed within parentheses to deemphasize this group,

which, in turn, emphasizes the students. *Corrected Version*: Fordham University School of Law encourages its students (and alumni) to contribute their time and skill in the service of others.

Answers: Colons

1. A colon is necessary to introduce the charges. *Corrected Version*: The defendant has two charges: possession of a firearm and robbery.
2. Use a colon to introduce the law. *Corrected Version*: The defendant is remaining pro se due to the United States law: "Innocent until proven guilty."
3. Use a colon to introduce the definition of "pro se." *Corrected Version*: The plaintiff is pro se: "on one's own behalf."
4. Use a colon in time to separate the hour and minutes. *Corrected Version*: The case is scheduled to start at 2:30 p.m.
5. Ratios should consist of a colon. *Corrected Version*: There's a 2:1 ratio of females to males in the interning class of summer 2018.
6. A colon should introduce the important qualities. *Corrected Version*: The new court attorney has many important qualities: organized, responsible, and patient.
7. A colon after an independent clause must introduce a quotation. *Corrected Version*: According to the witness, the victim said only one thing: "HELP!"
8. Use colons to separate book titles from subtitles. *Corrected Version*: Mary Shelley is the author of *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus*.
9. One space divides a colon from what follows it. *Corrected Version*: The plaintiff had two choices: fight or flee.
10. Capitalize the first letter in the independent clause if it follows a colon. *Corrected Version*: Never forget this point: Think before you speak.

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BECOMING A LAWYER

BY LUKAS M. HOROWITZ



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Halfway Home

What did I just write? What language were those questions written in? Did I just black out? Where am I? These are the natural questions that go through a law school student's head after every exam, myself included. Fortunately, I have figured out that I am sitting at my dining room table, looking at my computer. How exactly did I wind up here? Well, I am not quite sure about that. Another 16 credits toward the degree are on the books.

My last exam is done. I am exhausted and slightly delirious, yet the

NYSBA *Journal* deadline looms. So this month I offer just a few, scattered thoughts on law school life, with the promise of full details, and greater reflection, in February's column.

The bad news is that time flies. The good news is that I'm the pilot. Handing in my last final exam today marked a successful landing for the first half of law school. Three semesters up, three semesters down.

As sick and twisted as this may sound, I am already looking forward to the start of next semester. I have been

offered (and accepted) a field placement for the spring semester at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, working in the Office of Hearings and Mediation Services. More on this in the months to come.

So, as luck would have it, I am still flying. I've got enough gas to make it another three semesters, and in the event I have miscalculated, I can always make an emergency landing and pursue my career as an expressive dancer. ■

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Answers: Apostrophes

1. Only one plaintiff sued. The witness belongs to the plaintiff. An apostrophe and an *s* ('s) should be placed to show possession. *Corrected Version*: The plaintiff's witness testified for three hours.
2. The attorney belongs to Charles. An apostrophe and an *s* ('s) should be placed to show possession, even though Charles ends in *s*. It's common to use an apostrophe alone with a singular word ending in *s* to show possession (Justice Thomas' opinion). But the *Legal Writer* suggests using an apostrophe and *s* after singular words that end in *s*. Doing so is always correct. *Corrected Version*: Charles's attorney was late for the trial.
3. The interns belong to the judge. Possession needs to be evident in this sentence. *Corrected Version*:

The judges' interns were at the trial.

4. If a plural word doesn't end in *s*, add an apostrophe and an *s* ('s) to show possession. *Corrected Version*: The men's suits were all black.
5. An apostrophe and an *s* ('s) are added to all singular nouns to show possession, even if the nouns end in *s*. *Corrected Version*: Judge Rodriguez's ruling remained unquestioned.
6. Apostrophes are used to omit a letter or letters in a contraction. But contractions are rarely used in legal writing; although perfect in emails and *Legal Writer* columns, they're considered too informal in most other forms of legal writing. *Corrected Version*: The court officer should not allow the attorneys near the bench.
7. *It's* means *it is* or *it has*. To show possession, meaning belonging

to *it*, use *its*. *Corrected Version*: The law firm held its annual company meeting last week.

8. Contractions are used to write *it is* or *it has*. *Corrected Version*: It's the first day of trial.
9. Don't use an apostrophe in words that are plural but not possessive. *Corrected Version*: The defendant was born in the 1960s.
10. Don't use an apostrophe and an *s* ('s) to make a regular noun plural. Just add an *s*. *Corrected Version*: Apostrophes are confusing. ■

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