Name:

Rhetorical Grammars Worksheet: Punctuating Independent Clauses

Using a variety of punctuation can make your sentences more interesting, but that punctuation isn’t interchangeable. Once upon a time, most literature was part of an oral tradition, memorized and recited aloud. Looking at a manuscript prior to the invention of printing, you’ll find very few of the myriad of punctuation marks we have today. However, after the invention of printing and the increasing access to books and other printed material, it became necessary to use more signals to guide readers to understand how the text they see should be “heard.” Different punctuation marks communicate different things to your reader.

Independent clauses (clauses that can work as complete sentences by themselves) can be separated in a variety of ways.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Symbol** | **Example: Iago** | **Second Example** | **Effect/Purpose** | **Your Example** |
| Period (.) | “You, or any man living, may be drunk at some time, man. I’ll tell you what you shall do.” | Daryl scored the winning touchdown. Afterwards, the team went out to celebrate together. |  |  |
| Comma (,) and coordinating conjunction (and, but, so, for, or, nor) | “I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth than it should do offence to Michael Cassio, yet I persuade myself to speak the truth…” | Daryl scored the winning touchdown, but he didn’t take credit for winning the game. |  |  |
| Semicolon (;) | “My lord is fallen into epilepsy; this is his second fit, he had one yesterday.” | The cheerleaders jumped and shouted; the crowd roared. |  |  |
| Colon (:) | “To be, or not to be: that is the question.” (Couldn’t resist *Hamlet* here.)  “For when my outward action doth demonstrate the native act and figure of my heart in complement extern, ‘tis not long after but I will wear my heart upon my sleeve for daws to peck at: I am not what I am.”  (“daws” refers to the jackdaw bird, supposedly foolish) | It was amazing: even some members of the losing team cheered the winners. |  |  |
| Dash (—) | “If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than drowning—make all the money thou canst” (1.5.395-397).  “Your Dane, your German, and your swag-bellied Hollander—drink, ho!—are nothing to your English.” (Regarding drinking.) | Daryl tried to avoid the media—but three reporters immediately stuck their microphones in his face. |  |  |