USE THE COMMA (,)

1. To separate items in a series.
   - Series of words: Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Moslems were all represented.
   - Series of phrases: She kissed her little daughter on the forehead, on the nose, and on both cheeks.
   - Series of clauses: They came to the party, they bothered everyone, and they refused to leave.

   Special note: Some style guides and instructors will suggest leaving out the last comma in a series:
   Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Moslems were all represented.

2. To set off all types of nonrestrictive elements (information not necessary to the meaning of the sentence).
   - Boston, the site of the famous Tea Party, is a very old city.
   - The stream, once swift and clear, is now dry.
   - John, who knows everything about physics, can’t change a spark plug.
   - The jockeys sat bowed and relaxed, moving a little at the waist with the movement of their horses.

   Special note: Do not put commas around essential (restrictive) information: The woman who is sitting four seats to the left is stealing donuts. (The location of the woman is necessary to identify which woman).

3. To set off introductory elements.
   - After you’re done with your classes this afternoon, come over to my house.
   - Feeling tired and defeated, the senator took a nap and then went for a walk.
   - In the back yard, you will find all the evidence of the crime.
   - Finally, their long journey was over.

4. To connect independent clauses before a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).
   - We visit them during Christmas vacation, and they visit us every summer.
   - The batter swung at the ball three times, but he never came close to hitting it.

   Special note: Do not use a comma when the coordinating conjunction simply connects the two parts of a compound verb rather than two independent clauses.
   Correct: The batter swung at the ball but never came close to hitting it.
   Incorrect: The batter swung at the ball three times, but never came close to hitting it.

   In this sentence, but connect the two verbs swung and came, so no comma is necessary.

USE THE COLON (:)

1. To introduce a list or appositive, quote, or explanation after a complete sentence.
   - There are three kinds of theories that try to explain the secret of fire walking: physical, psychological, and spiritual.
   - She felt only one emotion after her exams were over: relief.
   - Consider the words of Benjamin Franklin: “Nothing gives an author so much pleasure as to find his works respectfully quoted by other learned authors.”
   - She could just imagine her trip to the supermall: she would shop, eat, shop, go to a movie, and shop!

2. After the salutation of a business letter, between numbers in a ratio, in the time of day, between titles and subtitles, and between city and publisher in bibliographical entries.
   - Dear Ms. Moorland:
   - The ratio of children to adults was 5:1.
   - Your appointment is at 3:45 p.m. on Tuesday.
   - I recently bought Lincoln: The Formative Years.
   - Boston: Bedford/St. Martins
USE THE SEMICOLON (;)
1. To connect closely related main clauses.
   ✓ I waited for him for an hour; he finally showed up after I left.
   ✓ The batter swung at the ball three times; however, he never came close to hitting it.

2. To separate a series of items that contains commas.
   ✓ A board is elected from each of three categories: for example, a judge or lawyer of good repute; a professor of art, literature, or one of the humanities; and a social worker, psychologist, or clergyman.

USE THE DASH (—)
1. To mark any sudden break.
   ✓ These candidates are campaigning for election in November—if they live until then.
   Special note: If word processing does not allow a long dash, two small hyphens are acceptable.

2. To set off elements added at the end of the sentence.
   ✓ As you discover new ideas, also try to find a form—to shape, limit, order, and select.

3. To set off interrupters, especially when they contain commas (a dash works as a “strong” comma).
   ✓ The canned goods—beans, potatoes, and peas—were donated to a local food bank.
   Special note: Dashes are used mainly in informal writing. Use them sparingly, if at all, in formal writing.

USE PARENTHESES ( )
1. To set off and de-emphasize explanatory or less important details that you want to insert into a sentence:
   ✓ Bliss Perry taught at Princeton (although he was there only two years).

USE THE APOSTROPHE ( ’ )
1. To mark a possessive:
   ✓ That is Ruth’s banana, so please refrain from eating it! (singular noun not ending in s)
   ✓ The elephants’ trunks were raised as a salute. (plural noun)
   ✓ The children’s toys should go in the toy box. (noun that forms its plural by changing the noun’s spelling.)

2. To mark the missing part of a word in a contraction (and other omissions).
   ✓ These bananas are mine, so don’t eat them!
   ✓ It’s ten o’clock. (originally ”It is ten of the clock.”)
   Special note: The possessive form of its needs no apostrophe: “This book is losing its binding.”

3. To form certain plurals when clarity is an issue.
   ✓ The typewriter won’t print e’s. (“The typewriter won’t print es” would have a different meaning)

USE QUOTATION MARKS ( “ ”)
1. To enclose a person’s exact words (words of direct address).
   ✓ Benjamin Franklin said, “A penny saved is a penny earned.”

2. To enclose titles of short works (chapter, poems, songs, movies, and so on).
   ✓ Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote the poem “Hiawatha.”