PUNCTUATION REFERENCE

(Some -- but not all -- of the rules.)

PERIOD
• at the end of sentences -- *John has measles.*
• after initials and abbreviations -- *Dr. Jones, Ph.D.*
• after numbers and in decimal -- *1., 2., 3., ... .5, 1.5*

QUESTION MARK
• at the end of direct questions -- *What is he doing?*
• not after indirect questions -- *He asked what it was."

EXCLAMATION POINT
• after emphatic statements -- *Help!  Be careful!"

COMMA
• to separate two main clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) -- *We rushed to the station, but the train had already left.*
• to separate a dependent clause from a main clause when the dependent clause precedes the main clause -- *If it is a nice day on Saturday, I will go to the football game.*
• Note: There is no comma when the clause order is reversed -- *I will go to the football game if it is a nice day on Saturday.*
• to set off interrupting statements -- *I know, of course, that you are studying.  He is, I believe, the worst player on the team.*
• to set off clauses beginning with *who, whom, or which* (relative clauses) when they are not absolutely necessary to identify or specify a particular person or thing -- *Mr. Jones, who lives on Market Street, crashed into a telephone pole while driving 90 miles per hour.*
• Note: Clauses which begin with the word *that* usually are essential in identifying particular persons or things; therefore, they are not usually set off by commas -- *The car that he was driving before the accident was demolished.*
• to set off an unnecessary restatement of someone's name (an appositive) -- *Mr. Smith, my father, is the man wearing a hat.*
• after introductory words such as *yes, no, first, second, however,* etc. -- *Yes, I'd like to go.*
• to set off nouns in direct address -- *Mrs. Smith, have you visited the art museum?  Have you heard, class, that the assignment is easy?"
• in direct quotations -- "*I understand," he said, "that you intend to go to France.*"
• in dates, between the day and the year -- *November 1, 1985.*
• between cities and states -- *He lives in Wilmington, Delaware.*
• to separate words in a series -- *I want milk, bread, butter, and cheese.  He hoped that the war would end, that the crime rate would drop, and that his personal problems would be solved."

more . . .
APOSTROPHE
• Omission of letters as in contractions -- he's, he is; don't, do not; we're, we are; it's, it is.
• to show plurals of letters and numbers (or omission of numbers) or words used as words -- 3's; blizzard of '89; Cross your t's and dot your i's.
• to show that a word is given a loose or colloquial pronunciation -- "none o' the boys is goin' t' be sick," he said.
• when no confusion results, use either 's or s to form such plurals as the following -- Count to 10,000 by 2's (or 2s). 1900's or 1900s
• to show singular possession:
  ▪ Add 's to singular nouns -- Harry's book, school's enrollment, sister's boyfriend
  ▪ Add 's to indefinite pronouns -- anybody's lesson, somebody's car, everyone's feelings
  ▪ Add ' to proper singular nouns ending in s -- Keats' poem, Ms. Evans' house
  ▪ Add 's to only the last word in singular compound nouns -- her mother-in-law's hats
• to show plural possession:
  ▪ Add only the ' to plural nouns ending in s -- the girls' coats, the boys' shoes
  ▪ Add 's to plural nouns not ending in s -- the men's hats, the children's toys
  ▪ Add ' only to the last word in plural compound nouns that end in s -- The Dean of Students' office, the Vice President of Legal Affairs' speech
    NOTE: for plural compound nouns, add 's to the last word of the compound noun -- mothers-in-law's opinions, sons-in-law's trucks
• to show other possession:
  ▪ Add 's when indicating individual ownership of two or more individuals --Mary's and Jane's books, Jim's and Bob's houses
  ▪ Add ' only to the final name when indicating joint ownership --Mary and Jane's book
  ▪ Use both of and ' to show one possession among several of the same kind -- an old hat of Tom's, a new dress of Jane's
  ▪ Do not use ' with the possessive form of personal pronouns. The personal pronouns his, hers, theirs, its, our, yours, and the pronoun whose are possessives as they stand and do not require the apostrophe -- his father, a book of hers, a friend of theirs, its nest
  ▪ Do not confuse the possessive pronoun whose with the contraction who's (who is) -- Who's coming over to dinner? Whose plate is this?
  ▪ Do not confuse the possessive pronoun its with the contraction it's (it is) -- We know it's a robin. We couldn't find its nest.

QUOTATION MARK
• the exact words of a speaker -- "Let's go there next week," he said.
• an interrupted quotation -- "Okay," yelled the crook, "hands up!"
• titles of poems, songs, stories, chapters, articles -- "Rip Van Winkle"

COLON
• after the greeting on a business letter -- Dear Sir:
• to introduce a list -- The following are needed: books, pencils, erasers, and pens.
SEMICOLON

• to separate two closely related independent clauses which do not have any other joining word -- *One is small; the other is large.*
• in compound sentences before such words as *furthermore, however, nevertheless, therefore, consequently,* etc. (transition words) -- *Out plane was three hours late; consequently, we did not arrive on time.*

HYPHEN

• to express the idea of a unit -- *I double-parked* (verb). *He owns a well-built house* (adj.)
• to avoid ambiguity -- *re-sign the petition* (compare with *resign from office*).
• if you must break a word at the end of a line, use a hyphen between syllables.

DASH

• to show a sudden break in thought
• to show emphasis before an appositive -- *Money, fame, power -- none of those things are important without health.*

UNDERLINING

• Titles of magazines, newspapers, books, movies, and plays -- *He likes to read The New York Times.*