Punctuation within a sentence: supplements, commas. . .

Nonessential (supplementary) information is set off with a matching PAIR. . .



Lesson `rw.conventions.W2`

The idea

Nonessential (supplementary) information is set off with a matching PAIR of punctuation marks: two commas, two dashes, or two parentheses, and the pair must match. Essential (restrictive) information that identifies the noun takes NO punctuation around it.

Is the inserted information essential (identifies the noun) or nonessential (extra)? Is there a list or explanation that a colon might introduce?

Nonessential: enclose with a matching pair of marks. Essential: no punctuation. Never split a subject from its verb with a single comma. Use a colon only after a complete clause.

Watch every step

For the camping trip, the essential items are ___ a tent, a stove, and a map.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- **A.** items are
- **B.** items are: ✗ *colon misuse*
- **C.** items are; ✗ *colon misuse*
- **D.** items are, ✗ *unnecessary comma*

Why A — "items are." Place or remove punctuation according to whether the element is essential, and check colon placement.

Now a harder one

The novel ___ explores themes of memory and loss. (The clause 'which won several awards' is extra information.)

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

A. , which won several awards,

B. which won several awards ✗ *essential/nonessential error*

C. , which won several awards ✗ *unpaired/mismatched supplement*

D. which won several awards, ✗ *unnecessary comma*

Why A — ", which won several awards,." Place or remove punctuation according to whether the element is essential, and check colon placement.

The method, in one line

Punctuation within a sentence: supplements, commas & colons

Nonessential: enclose with a matching pair of marks. Essential: no punctuation. Never split a subject from its verb with a single comma. Use a colon only after a complete clause.

Are supplement marks PAIRED and matching? Did I leave essential information unpunctuated? Did I avoid a stray comma between subject and verb? Does any colon follow a complete clause?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

⚠ unpaired/mismatched supplement

Sets off a nonessential element with only one mark, or with mismatched marks (a comma paired with a dash), instead of a matching pair.

⚠ essential/nonessential error

Puts commas around essential (restrictive) information, or omits the commas around nonessential information.

Name the trap before you pick — most wrong answers are one of these two.

Try it, then watch the walk-through

Explore this live

Watch the walk-through