

Janyre's Special Punctuation Cheat Sheet

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Em dash "—"

- Replaces commas, parentheses, or colons—depending on the circumstances. No spaces before or after the em dash.
- Signals interrupted dialogue:

"I didn't mean you should—"
"That's exactly what you meant."

Or, in the case of a phone ringing (This is not awesome prose, but it gives you the idea):

"I didn't mean you should—"
The phone rang making Janie jump.

If you're interrupting with action from the character:

"I didn't mean you should" —she slammed her coffee cup on the counter—"go to the mall with him!" [Note the interesting spaces, which are different on purpose.]

- How to insert an em dash:
 - Keyboard commands:
 - PC: [Ctrl]+[Alt]+ - (I think. I'm on a mac and can't test it.)
 - Mac: [Shift]+[Opt]+ -
 - Menu:
 - Insert/Symbol/Advanced Symbol/Special Characters
 - AutoCorrect:
 - PC: Tools/AutoCorrect/AutoFormat as You Type/Check Hypens (--) with dash (—)
 - Mac: Word Menu/Preferences/ AutoCorrect/AutoFormat as You Type/Check Hypens (--) with dash (—)

En dash “–”

- Shows a range, replacing the "to" in 1 to 5. No spaces before or after the en dash.
- How to insert an en dash:
 - Keyboard commands:
 - PC: [Alt]+0150
 - Mac: [Opt]+ -
 - Menu:
 - Insert/Symbol/Advanced Symbol/Special Characters

Semi-colon “;”

- Joins together two complete sentences that are closely related:
 - Complete sentence + ; + Complete sentence
 - Complete sentence + [Conjunctive Adverb like however] + Complete Sentence
- Replaces a comma when you need a comma to set off a phrase in a list (Jaime; Franky; my youngest son, Jo; and Marie went to the store)

Exclamation Points “!”

- Used to show excitement or emphasis.

Ellipses (or suspension points) “. . .”

- Shows where you’ve omitted words in a quotation. Unless you’re writing a technical work, don’t start a quotation with ellipses even if you start in the middle of the quoted sentence.
- Indicates a character trailing off or pausing in dialogue.

Notes

- Do not overuse special punctuation. Exclamation points especially become tiresome quickly (it’s like you’re constantly yelling at your reader). Only use these if absolutely necessary. Otherwise, consider rewriting your sentence.
- My go-to resource for regularly occurring punctuation dilemmas is Dreyer's English. He tells me the right answer AND makes me laugh. What's not to like about that?

Have more questions? Let me know over on my Facebook Group, Editing Insiders:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/348465892722848/?ref=bookmarks>