

Commas, Parentheses, and Dashes

Teach/Model

Point out that sometimes a writer needs to use punctuation to add information to a sentence.

- Explain that **commas** indicate slight pauses. *The pause that a comma creates calls little attention to itself.* Provide an example: *After the last boom of thunder, Alison dove under the covers.*
- Define **parentheses**. *Parentheses are round brackets used to add or explain information in a sentence.* Provide an example: *Dom tried (and failed) several times before playing his guitar solo correctly.*
- Define a **dash**. *A dash is used to show an abrupt break or change in thought.* Provide an example: *The three of them—Sal, Chuck, and Ray—formed a band.*
- Write the examples below on the board. Use the modeling to demonstrate how to use commas, ellipses, and dashes to create pauses.

| Example | Model/Think Aloud |
|---|--|
| Commas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Today, I went to the dentist. • The dentist, Dr. Ramirez, examined my teeth. • She said I would need three fillings, unfortunately. | <i>In each sentence, the commas set off text that isn't needed for the sentence to make sense. When such text is at the beginning of a sentence, it is followed by one comma. When it comes in the middle of a sentence, it has a comma before and after it. When it comes at the end, it has a comma before it.</i> |
| Parentheses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The doctor returned after five minutes (but it felt like an eternity to me). • She looked at the X-rays carefully (I tried to take a peek, too), before confirming the sad truth. | <i>In each sentence, the parentheses surround information that is not needed for the sentence to make sense. Information in parentheses can serve as an aside that adds commentary, or a clarification that adds information.</i> |
| Dashes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My mom—she's going to be so mad—is picking me up. • I really do take good care of my teeth—or so I thought. | <i>In each sentence, the dashes punctuate abrupt changes in thought. Use a dash and no spaces on either side of the text when the change in thought comes in the middle of the sentence. Use one dash and no space when the change in thought comes at the end.</i> |

Guided Practice/Apply

Write these sentences on the board. Have students use the given mark to punctuate each sentence.

1. Dash: The best and I mean, the best ride is the Supersonic Coaster. (*The best—and I mean, the best—ride is the Supersonic Coaster.*)
2. Comma: In the first place it's a gazillion stories high. (*In the first place, it's a gazillion stories high.*)
3. Parentheses: I've been on that thing a lot too many times to count! (*I've been on that thing a lot (too many times to count)!*)

Have students check their recent writing to be sure they have correctly used commas, parentheses, and dashes.