Mastery Series: Punctuation Exercises

Quick Sentence Diagnostic
Are the following solid sentences or rule-breakers (RB)?
*Sentences borrowed from Warriner’s.
1. *When you drive a car, you must carry liability insurance, which pays for any damage or injury that you may inflict on others. RB – add an introductory comma between car and you
2. *Insurance in some places is cheaper than it is in others. RB – remove comma (IC DC)
3. *How much insurance costs depends on how congested traffic is in the area. SOLID
4. *If you live in a rural community, you probably pay much less than you would if you lived in a city. RB – remove second comma (DC, IC DC)
5. *An unmarried male who is under twenty-five pays the highest premium because statistics show that he is the worst risk. RB – remove comma (IC DC)
6. *Drivers who have a record of accidents must also pay a high premium since they have cost their insurance companies a great deal of money. RB – remove semi-colon or remove since
7. If you are properly insured, it is a very good idea to drive to and around Lake Tahoe. RB – add introductory comma between insured and it
8. I particularly recommend the East shore of Lake Tahoe, but if you are going during Winter then you might prefer Kirkwood and the West shore. RB – add a FANBOY comma in between Tahoe and but

Quick Check:
Solid! I walk to the beach because the sun shines.
RB! I walk to the beach; because the sun shines. One way to fix: remove the semi-colon.
RB! Jesus’ followers wrote about their experiences. Unless you’re referring to more than one “Jesu,” fix by adding an “s” to Jesus’: Jesus’s.
1. False Every long sentence can be termed a run-on sentence.
2. False Writers should take mental guillotines to every long sentence.
3. Correct I love the rain; I also really appreciate the sunshine.

Coordinating Conjunction (FANBOY) commas (Solid or RB?)
1. Solid! Needing a break from writing, I walk to the store and buy coffee.
2. RB! I run to the store and they are totally sold out of coffee. Comma after “store”
3. Solid! I am forced, instead, to buy wine, and I also purchase a newspaper.
4. RB! Luckily, I enjoy wine and also enjoy reading. A friend of mine once said that much of writing is thinking. That’s great but I have a deadline. Comma after “great”

Introductory (INTRO.) commas (Solid or RB?)
1. RB! Conversely I wondered if a break wasn’t actually good for writing. Comma after “Conversely”
2. Solid! Later in the day, I realized that I could plan breaks.
3. Solid! I also realize that making coaching appointments could serve as deadlines.
4. RB! When I realize all of that and start making appointments I suddenly feel better about this whole writing thing. Comma after “appointments”

Oxford commas (remember, consistency; whether you choose to use them or no) (Solid or RB?)
1. RB! After working with the writing coaches, it was suddenly much easier to write, to read and to spot typos on twitter. Comma after “and” (before “to spot”)
2. Solid! At the store, George bought scotch, oranges, and two steaks.
3. **RB!** The coaches welcome students to work with one of us, two of us, every single one of us or anything in between. Whatever works for you makes us happy. *Comma after “us” (before “or anything”)*

4. **Solid!** Sometimes, I have a harder time than you would think coming up with new comma exercise examples, whether on the FANBOY commas, the INTRO. commas, or the Oxford commas. Examples of the 10th comma rule always come easily, though.

**Non-essential element (NE) commas (Solid or RB?)**

1. **RB!** Jane, who has just started studying at NPS likes the coast. *Comma after “NPS”*
2. **RB!** The fact that a majority of UN countries including the United States and China agreed helped the peace process. *Comma after “countries” and after “China”*
3. **Solid!** We all wondered, however, how long peace would last.
4. **RB!** Fortunately, in 2022 a group of children came together and decided they also wanted peace. Amazingly, with the help of their parents, they really helped change things. *Comma after “2022”*

**Commas, mixed (Solid or RB?)**

1. **Solid if using the Oxford comma, RB if not!** The soldier was happy to see his parents, his teacher, and his mentor.
2. **RB if using the Oxford comma, Solid if not!** The soldier was happy to see his parents, his teacher and his mentor.
3. **RB!** Toward the end of the conflict economic growth had become stagnant. *Comma after “conflict”*
4. **Solid!** Since its inception, the Department of Homeland Security has faced funding challenges.
5. **Solid!** Food that is gray makes me nervous.
6. **Solid!** Gray foods, which are completely unnatural, make me nervous.

**Semi-colons (Solid or RB?)**

1. **Solid!** Most people prefer Coke over Pepsi; even the PepsiCo offices have Coke machines hidden away.
2. **Solid!** She handed him the summons; he was crushed.
3. **RB!** He was crushed; when she handed him the summons. *One way to fix: remove semi-colon*
4. **RB!** Chapter VI presents my conclusion; and areas for future research. *One way to fix: remove semi-colon*
5. **Solid!** NPS has students from all over the world, including Istanbul, Turkey; Manama, Bahrain; and Toronto, Canada.

**Apostrophes (Solid or RB?)**

1. **RB!** He could not stop eating pancake’s. *Apostrophes do not form plurals. Use “pancakes”*
2. **Solid!** A puppy’s love is forever. So, too, is its incredible ability to shed.
3. **Solid!** The CIA’s policy is to exclude all weapons from the building.
4. **Solid!** Have you learned your ABCs?
5. **Solid!** The girls from Queens flaunted their ’80s hairstyles.
6. **RB!** Jesus’ followers went on to live. *Not unless you have more than one “Jesu.” Use “Jesus’s”*

**Test drive your punctuation knowledge (can you find 15 punctuation errors?)**

“I can see by my **watch, without** taking my hand from the left grip of the cycle, that it is eight-thirty in the morning. The wind, even at sixty miles an **hour, is** warm and humid. When it’s this hot and muggy at eight-thirty, I’m wondering what it’s going to be like in the afternoon.

In the wind [there] are pungent odors from the marshes by the road. We are in an area of the Central **Plains,** filled with thousands of duck hunting **sloughs, heading** northwest from Minneapolis toward the Dakotas. This highway is an old concrete **two-lane** that hasn't had much **traffic since** a four-laner went in parallel to it several years ago. When we pass a **marsh, the air suddenly becomes cooler. Then, when we are past, it suddenly warms up again.”

- Robert M. Pirsig