ENGLISH SKILLS

PUNCTUATION GUIDELINES

Consult a grammar book for comprehensive coverage of all punctuation rules.

Period (.)

- Used at the end of a statement, request, or indirect question.
  Examples: I ate the pizza. Speak more slowly. I wonder who will win.
- Used in abbreviations for titles, degrees, and expressions of time.
  Examples: Sue Clark, M.D.; The play begins at 7:30 p.m.

Comma (,)

- Used to set off elements that interrupt a sentence.
  Example: That boy, in fact, worked very hard this summer.
- Used to separate items in a list.
  Example: I like hot dogs, cake, and tacos.
- Used to set off non-essential clauses and non-essential participial phrases.
  Example: Ashley, who is in my brother's grade, broke the school record for the 100-meter dash.
- Used after introductory dependent clauses.
  Example: If you study, you will pass.
- Used to set off an appositive.
  Example: William Shakespeare, a famous English playwright, wrote *Romeo and Juliet.*
- **Warning!** Commas tend to be overused. If you are unsure, consult your instructor or a grammar book. **When in doubt, leave the comma out; it's better to have too few than too many.**

Quotation Marks (" ")

- Used around the exact words of a speaker.
  Example: Laura asked, "Have you been to the movie?"
- **Warning!** Do not be fooled by a sentence like the one below. It is not a direct quote and does not require quotation marks.
  Example: Laura asked if I had been to the movie.

Apostrophe (')

- Used in place of the omitted letters of a contraction.
  Example: does not = doesn't
- Used to form possessive nouns.
  Examples: baby's rattle, students' books, dog's collar.

Colon (:)

- Used to show a list of items that follows it.
  Example: He participates in three sports: football, basketball, and track.
- Do not use a colon directly following a form of the verb **be** or a preposition.
  Example: His four favorite writers are Bradbury, King, Donne, and Thoreau.

Semicolon (;)

- Used between the clauses of a compound sentence that are not joined by *and, or, but,* or *nor.* It can be regarded as a weak period.
  Example: I reserved the room for the party; Sally took care of the music.

