



Palm Beach Atlantic University
Center for Writing Excellence

USING PARENTHESIS, COMMA SETS, AND M-DASHES

Symbols

- Parenthesis set ()
- Comma set , ,
- M-dash —

Parentheses

Parentheses are used to surround a phrase that is an aside, a clarification, or a commentary that is *not* critical to the meaning of the sentence. They are the *least* emphatic way to add additional information to a sentence.

The 30th anniversary of the eruption of Mount St. Helens (May 18, 1980) brought back vivid memories of ash and darkness.

Comma Sets

Two commas are often used to separate a section of a sentence that, while containing necessary information, can be removed without creating a sentence fragment. Additionally, comma sets maintain the flow of the sentence, as their size is small.

Double commas direct attention to a phrase in a *more* emphatic way than parentheses.

The ability to grade coins, a skill requiring experience as well as knowledge, cannot be learned overnight from a textbook.

M-Dashes

The elongated dash also isolates important—but not necessary—information.

M-dashes are used to place *heavy* emphasis on dramatic phrases, and must be used sparingly.

The ship's crew—after three days at sea in a raft—reached the coast of St. Thomas.