

**HAND-BOOK OF PUNCTUATION:  
WITH INSTRUCTIONS FOR  
CAPITALIZATION, LETTER-  
WRITING AND PROOF-READING**

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Hand-Book of Punctuation: With Instructions for Capitalization, Letter-Writing and Proof-Reading by W. J. Cocker

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**W. J. COCKER**

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OF  
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AND  
PROOF-READING.

BY

W. J. COCKER, A. M.

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EDUCATION DEPT.

## PREFACE.

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As the pronunciation of words is determined by the usage of the best speakers, so, in a great measure, the punctuation of sentences is based on the usage of the best writers. Recognizing this fact, the author has aimed,—

1. To state such general rules as are recognized by most writers of good English.
2. To illustrate these rules by examples taken from many of our best English classics.
3. To give some of the differences in usage that exist even among the best of writers.

It is frequently asserted that even good writers differ so much in their use of punctuation marks that it is impossible to lay down any general rules, and that it is better for each one to consult his own taste and judgment. With equal reason it might be said that inasmuch as good speakers, and even lexicographers, differ in the pronunciation of words, therefore each speaker should make his own taste and judgment the standard for correct pronunciation. A writer's mode of expressing his thoughts will determine the character and number of the punctuation marks that he uses, and it is chiefly owing to this that even good writers differ somewhat in punctuating what they have written. There are some rules that are invariable under all circumstances; the use of others depends on the mental characteristics of the writer; and there are still other rules, the application of which is determined by the writer's taste alone.

By gestures, tones of voice, oratorical pauses, emphasis, and in various ways, a speaker can make his meaning clear

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to his listeners; and so a writer should certainly use all the aids which punctuation, capitals, and italics afford, in presenting clearly what he has written for the perusal of others. Business men, however, seem to think that they are not amenable to the rules that govern good writers. They affirm that they have no time to punctuate their letters, and yet they subject others to the necessity of expending time and patience in trying to make out their meaning. Serious misunderstandings have arisen between business men, in consequence of the omission or incorrect use of punctuation marks, and expensive lawsuits have originated in the careless punctuation of legal instruments.

Very little attention is paid in our public schools to punctuation, and the rules usually given in English Composition are either disregarded or not properly understood. This may, perhaps, be accounted for by the fact that the rules are wanting in clearness, and are not sufficiently illustrated by examples. The aim of this volume is to remedy, in some measure, these evils, and to secure more attention to what ought to be a prominent part of school instruction. The evils of bad punctuation are really more serious than the evils of bad spelling, and no student can be said to have learned to read well, much less to write well, who has not studied punctuation intelligently.

We would suggest that this hand-book be used at Rhetorical Exercises, and that when essays, orations, criticisms, &c., are handed to the teacher for correction, he should use a red or a blue pencil, so that corrections may be the more readily recognized. Besides the corrections in grammar, spelling, &c., he should be careful to supply punctuation marks when needed, cross out needless ones, and, of course, make such other corrections as may be necessary. When the productions are returned to the pupils, the teacher should first point out the necessity of using certain marks, in order to define



and bring out the meaning, and to show the relation between the different members of a sentence. Having thus shown the need of punctuation marks, then reference should be made to some of the simpler rules, to impress this need on the mind. Great care should be taken not to perplex the mind with too many rules before the necessity is created for their use. The great difficulty in the study of punctuation has been that many rules are committed to memory before the need of their use has arisen, so that the mind is perplexed and bewildered instead of enlightened. The rule, it must be remembered, does not create the necessity: the necessity creates the rule. Then, again, we think a great mistake is made by having the beginner punctuate what some one else has written. The better plan is for the pupil, at the very outset, to punctuate what he himself has composed, and in his effort to bring out his own meaning clearly, he will, with the aid of a few rules, almost intuitively fall into the habit of punctuating correctly.

The following suggestions may be of service:—

1. Do not give a pupil a rule to learn, unless it is clearly founded upon examples taken from what he himself has written.
2. Take, at first, the simplest, most frequently used, and most readily understood rules.
3. Advance slowly, remembering that a few simple principles clearly understood, are of much more practical benefit than a number of misty rules hastily committed to memory.

In the preparation of this hand-book, the author is under obligations to various authorities, but he is more especially indebted to Wilson's "Treatise on Punctuation."

W. J. COCKER,

ADRIAN, Mich., Dec. 26, 1877.

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