

The



Nitpicker's
Guide

*Punctuation
Power*

Kent Butler



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The Nitpicker's Guide to Punctuation

INTRODUCTION

It seems like there are about 47,631 rules pertaining to punctuating the English language. Some are seldom used, some are a little strange, and some only apply if you're from somewhere else. It pleases me no end – and probably you, too – to assure you that we're only going to cover a relative handful here. But, they'll be the ones that are most appropriate for your normal, everyday writing. We're nothing if not practical.

It took them a while to realize it, but the ancient Greeks and Romans had a tough time communicating in writing. They not only didn't use any punctuation, they didn't even use spaces between words, so their

WRITINGLOOKEDSOMETHINGLIKETHISWHICHISPRETTYHARDTOREAD

Eventually, so legend has it, the Roman scholar Meritricious Gappus--or maybe his sister, Felicitus Gappus--came up with the idea of putting spaces between words. That helped a lot. Later on, the Greek Goddess, Apostrodite, gave the people rudimentary punctuation, and written communications became much easier. It may not have inspired a flood of letter writing, but it was sure easier to read “Et tu, Brute” than ETTUBRUTE, so every little bit helped. Upper *and lower* case letters would have been nice, too. Those came later.

Think about music. It has pace and tempo; it builds and falls, ebbs and flows.

Punctuation does the same thing for words that a composer does with music. Proper punctuation helps the writer deliver the message as intended. Improper, or missing, punctuation can make it more difficult to read and understand. It can even change the message entirely.

If you doubt that, punctuate this to your liking:

Woman without her man is useless

Now, reverse the meaning using only punctuation.

Any questions?

Hearing none, The Nitpicker said, "Let's get into it."



By the way, the legends I mentioned earlier are purely products of my imagination. Well, how pure they are is a matter of some debate. Anyway, my lawyer said I should do this so someone doesn't get all wobbly when they can't find the legend anywhere else. Give me a break! But, she is admitted to the bar. In my youth, I was admitted to many, many bars, but never to the bar – so...

APOSTROPHE ’

This first thing drives me right up the wall, so let's dispense with it right away:

1. **NEVER** use an apostrophe simply to create a *plural* (see possible exceptions below).

There are four Robert's in our immediate family. (*wrong*—no apostrophe)
We go out for breakfast on Sunday's (*wrong*—no apostrophe)

Well, I feel better, don't you? Sure, you already knew that, but many people didn't.

Now, about that exception. Some people say if the plural might be confusing to your reader without the apostrophe, use it. And, use a lower case s. This applies primarily to numerals and some acronyms.

Cynthia scored 8's and 9's for her dives in the second round.

People had to show their ID's to get in. (You also see I.D., of course, but that makes no sense to me as *identification* is one word. So, why should it require two periods to abbreviate it? Eh?)

I am not one of the people who believes these exceptions with the apostrophe are necessary, but you should know about them anyway. To me, context tells the tale and clarifies the usage.

2. Use an apostrophe to make a noun *possessive*, showing a relationship between two nouns. To identify the *base word*, the one you're making possessive, invert the phrase and insert *of* or *of the* between the words:

doctors office—office of the doctor—doctor's office (singular) add 's
farmers market—market of the farmers—farmers' market (regular plural, one ending in *s*) just add the apostrophe
peoples court—court of the peoples—people's court (irregular plural, one *not* ending in *s*) add 's (others include men, women, children, deer, fish)

Be alert for singular words that end in *s*; they can be tricky:

The silver was Judas's. (singular)

Where are the bosses's offices? (more than one boss, more than one office)

Exception: If the added 's makes pronunciation awkward, some writers use only the apostrophe. Either is acceptable.



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To show *joint possession*, use 's or s' with the last noun only.

Where is Carlos and Maria's new house? (two people, one house)

To show *individual possession*, make all nouns possessive.

Roger's and Emily's requirements for a new car were quite different. (two people, two sets of requirements)

3. Use an apostrophe to indicate *letters or numbers have been let out*, thus making a *contraction*.

It's is the *contraction* of it is or it has. Its is the *possessive* of it, but needs **no** apostrophe. The two are never interchangeable. Confusing it's and its may be the most common error in writing, but not one you'll make anymore. Right?

The jury couldn't reach a verdict; they could not even agree on stopping to eat.

He is a child of the '60s, an unreconstructed hippie.

It's really great to see you again!

The car sounded like its muffler had a hole in it.

4. Avoid misusing the apostrophe; your writing will look better. Besides, it never did anything to you.

Never use it with nouns that are not possessive. (Sound familiar? I thought it was worth repeating.)

Questions of honor used to be settled with duel's. (Wrong!)

Do not use apostrophes in possessive pronouns: hers, his, its, ours, theirs, whose, yours



BRACKETS []

Brackets look like squared-off parentheses. They might make good bookends. It's not their fault, it just is.

1. The only reason to use *brackets* is to enclose material *you add* to a word-for-word (verbatim) quote. Such material takes two forms:

A. Explanatory words or phrases

Carole said, "I'm working on a project with Habitat [for Humanity] this weekend, so I'll be late."

B. The Latin word *sic*, in brackets, is used to show that the error appeared in the original material. Italicize *sic*, but not the brackets.

The reviewer wrote, "Baldwin's performance was thoroughly disappointing, even considering his mediocer [*sic*] abilities."

Take care not to overuse *sic*, however, as it may be seen as snobbish. The above quote could have been handled like this: The reviewer said that, even considering Baldwin's mediocre abilities, his performance was "thoroughly disappointing."

2. When I wrote *only reason* above, I meant it. There is no number two. Stop reading.



COLON :

There is no doubt in my mind that you know I mean a punctuation mark rather than an internal organ, but why risk it? It's punctuation.

The colon is stupefyingly simple. Its primary function is to *introduce*. You can use it to introduce a word, phrase, sentence, list, or quotation. Unfortunately, you cannot use it to be introduced to that person you've been eyeing across the room. Sorry.

The colon *puts more emphasis* on what follows than if you didn't use it. This is so because the colon brings your readers to a stop and focuses their attention.

Brian had only one thing in mind: a cold beer.
Brian had only one thing in mind: football.
Brian had only one thing in mind: Connie.
Brian had three things in mind: a cold beer, football, and Connie. He'd probably do well to revise that order.

Consider the words of Mark Twain: "The human race has only one really effective weapon, and that is laughter."

Other uses include the greeting in a business letter:

Dear Mr. Claus:

Separation of the hour and minutes in a time notation

5:30am 11:30pm (long day...)

Separation of chapter and verse in Bible references:

John 3:16

Do not use a colon after *such as*, *including* or *for example* – these words are introductions, which is the function of the colon. So, use one or the other, but not both.

Nor do you want to stick a colon in between a preposition (at, by, for, from, et al) and its object (a verb or an adjective). You know how Mom feels about that.

Their East Coast tour consisted of: Boston, New York, Baltimore, Richmond, Atlanta, and Miami. (Wrong – NO colon. Don't let Mom see that.)



COMMA ,

It must not be easy to be a **comma**. They are often ignored, forgotten, overused, misplaced, argued about, and abused. Together, maybe we can right some of those wrongs. Okay, steady now...

One purpose of the comma is to get your reader to pause. Think of it as a flashing yellow light at an intersection. The intended message is slow down, assess, and proceed.

1. Use a comma to separate two *independent clauses* when they are joined by any *coordinating conjunction*: (comma first) and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet

He put the car in the garage, and it suddenly started to rain.

She flipped on the switch, but the light wasn't working.

A girl has to eat sometime, so she was glad to accept his invitation to lunch.

There are some people who think the comma can be eliminated if the independent clauses are short enough to avoid misreading. I am not one of them.

2. After an *introductory phrase*, you need to use a comma. Actually, your reader does. Use a comma to separate words that come before the main idea. Starter words for such a phrase include: after, although, as, because, if, since, when, and while. But, there are others.

Merging onto the Interstate, Roger noticed his car was smoking badly.

Although it was nearly new, Emily suddenly realized her SUV was truly ugly.

After dinner, Roger and Emily headed for the Jaguar dealership.

3. A *parenthetical element* adds information to a sentence, and sometimes what might be called "flavor". But, it is *nonessential information*; its removal would not affect the meaning of the sentence. Such information should be enclosed by commas, rather than

parentheses (I frequently mix both, I'm just telling you what the rule is. I often include nonessential information. It's a matter of personal style "triumphing" over strict observance of the rules. Depends on who you ask.) Parentheses are big and clunky (see?), but commas are small and agile, and draw less attention. After all, this *is* nonessential information we're talking about.

Their new house, a contemporary design, was the first Carlos and Maria had ever owned.

The neighbors across the street, in the gray colonial, seemed to be childless.

They had all waved at one another, leaving each morning, but hadn't met.

When a *parenthetical element* follows a *coordinating conjunction* (see above), however, we **do not** use a comma before the *parenthetical element*.

Roger and Emily headed for Harrigan's Pub after work, but they did every Friday.
(no comma after "but")

They expected Clinton to lie about his actions, for that was his usual practice.
(no comma after "for")

Carlos called Maria to meet after work, but it took him three tries to connect.
(no comma after "but") Who was she talking to? Should he be jealous?

4. Use commas to offset *appositives*, which are words that explain what preceded them.

Maria and Carlos, new to the area, decided to find a comfortable watering hole.

Parking at Harrigan's Pub, a popular local spot, was always at a premium.

Mike Harrigan, the pub's owner, usually moved from table to table, visiting his customers.

5. Separate *coordinate adjectives* with commas. These are adjectives having equal status in describing the noun; neither being subordinate to the other. Here are two quick tests to help you decide:



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- ◆ Does the sentence make sense if you write the adjectives in reverse order?
- ◆ Does the sentence make sense if you write the adjectives with “and” between them?

If you can answer “Yep, you bet!”, or something similar, to these questions, then the adjectives are coordinate and should be separated by a comma. (But they’ll still be friends.)

Roger is a hard-working, successful entrepreneur. (coordinate)

Tonight, Maria wore a burgundy jersey dress. (non-coordinate)

Emily has an easy, friendly smile. (coordinate)

Carlos is a sought-after graphic artist. (non-coordinate)

6. Use a comma to set off a *direct quotation* from the phrase that introduces or explains it.

Entering Harrigan’s Pub, Roger said, “Mike, you’ve got to arrange for more parking somewhere!”

“Roger, my love,” Emily smiled, taking his arm, “come tell me about your day.”

“I’m sure glad you saw this parking spot!”, Carlos said, smiling at Maria.

7. Install a comma *before the final “and” in a series* – this is not required, but I recommend it for clarity. It has become fashionable to drop *both* the commas and the “and” in the name of businesses. I, for one, think it’s just silly-looking. Call me a reactionary. So the law firm Dewey, Stickem, and Howe has become Dewey Stickem Howe. Silly looking. And the joke dies. *Use the comma and the “and” in a normal series:*

She was beautiful, graceful, very classy, and a great performer. Roger bought the Jaguar.

Maria’s photographs were praised as innovative, exciting, and flawless.

Emily was considering leaving banking for something more challenging, exciting, and satisfying. “The money is okay,” she said, “but that’s not the answer.”

8. Use commas to separate *words that interrupt* the flow of a simple sentence (see semicolons).

Carlos was thrilled, of course, by Maria’s growing success as a photographer.
Roger, however, was concerned about Emily’s mounting discontent.
Emily, in fact, was thinking about going to graduate school.

9. Commas are needed to set off *geographical names, day-date elements* and *titles that follow the name*.

Annapolis, Maryland, is called “America’s Sailing Capital.”
Who lives at Number Ten Downing Street in London, England?
America’s Birthday is July 4, 1776.
No comma is needed in July 1776, nor in the military version, 4 July 1776.
The patient was seen by Marcus Welby, M.D.

10. Use commas whenever necessary to *prevent confusion or misreading*, but don’t get too enthused about the idea. Comma abuse isn’t pretty, just poor punctuating.

None of the disasters we feared might happen, happened.
You’re not actually going to eat that, are you?
To Marilyn, Monroe was a tragic legend.

Unnecessary COMMAS

We know commas are vitally important, but abusing them makes reading what you've written more difficult. Using commas in the wrong places can chop up a good sentence into illogical and confusing pieces. So don't.

11. Don't use a comma between sentence elements that are *not independent clauses*.

Yes, you'll insert one before a coordinating conjunction (see above), but that's when both clauses can stand on their own as sentences.

Roger looked over the familiar menu and realized he wasn't very hungry.

Carlos was pleased there was a wine list but found it rather limited.

(No comma before *and* or *but* because the phrases following them are not independent.)

12. Don't use a comma to separate a verb from its subject or object.

Restaurants with extensive wine lists are becoming very popular.

(No comma after *lists*.)

The most important attribute of a sommelier is his extensive knowledge of wine.

(No comma after *sommelier*.)

13. No commas, please, between cumulative adjectives (cannot be separated with *and*), or between an adjective and the noun it modifies.

Behind her old camera case Maria found several rolls of undated color film.

(No comma after *undated*.)

Roger was wearing his new custom-made blue suit.

(No comma after any of the adjectives.)

It was a silly, emotional misunderstanding.

(No comma after *emotional*.)

14. Don't use a comma between an adverb and the adjective it modifies.

Emily had come to view her current employment as seriously limited.

(No comma after *seriously*. Seriously.)

Carlos had become widely respected as a graphic designer and artist.

(No comma after *widely*, please.)

15. Don't *follow* a coordinating conjunction (see #1) with a comma.

Maria has a nice studio, but she likes the challenge of shooting outdoors.

(After *but*, no comma.)

Roger was considering selling his Internet company, and launching a new business. (No comma after *and*.) ♦

DASH --

1. A dash is two, *never* just one but two, hyphens (with no space between them), or one long *em* mark. The American rule is that a dash is neither preceded nor followed by a space. It is virtually connected to the words it separates. Our British friends, however, insert a space on either side of the dash, and that's my preference. The American version is too cramped for me – too scrunched-up, to use the technical term....

American: We were running late—not unusual for us—and would surely miss the flight.

British: The family had just been seated – well, some were still standing – when we arrived at the restaurant.

2. Dashes can be used to *replace* commas, colons, semicolons, and parentheses – but do so in moderation. Using too many dashes can cut the writing into disjointed chunks, and suggests that the writer needs to learn more about punctuation.

Some people – certainly not the majority – are fond of dashes. They sometimes say – and I suppose it's possible – that it's a matter of style. But – really – there are other punctuation marks – just ask!



ELLIPSIS ...

The ellipsis is a space, three evenly spaced periods, and a space, that comprise a single unit of punctuation. If you're a Scrabble player, the plural is ellipses. Come to think of it, that's also the plural if you're *not* a Scrabble player.

Use an ellipsis to indicate that you've *omitted part* of an otherwise word-for-word quotation.

This: The article said “the banquet was to honor firefighters from across both the city and county for performing heroic rescues.”

Becomes: The article said “the banquet was to honor firefighters ... for performing heroic rescues.”

This: “The committee plans to issue a report detailing the depth and scope, as well as the results, of the investigation.”

Becomes: “The committee plans to issue a report detailing ... the results of the investigation.”

The ellipsis is also used to *suggest unfinished thoughts*, or mark an *interruption or hesitation*.

Maria looked embarrassed, saying, “No! what I really meant was ...oh ...”

“Mr. Julius, perhaps you should sit down ...” Dr. Caligula trailed off.

“Oh, Roger,” Emily smiled, hanging up the phone, “we have something else to talk about” (yes, four dots – see following)

There is not complete agreement about this, but most authorities say to use a period to end a declarative sentence after an ellipsis (as above). Imagine that, disagreement about something in English usage – simply shocking!



EXCLAMATION POINT !

Frequently abused, and apparently misunderstood, the exclamation point is intended to express exceptional feeling or special emphasis.

Save on used shoes at Frugal Frank's all this week!

When Beau proposed, Belle's heart leapt into her throat, making it very hard to speak!

The exclamation point is intended to help express *special emphasis or strong emotion*: great surprise, incredulity, or terror, for example. It should be used **sparingly**. End mildly exclamatory sentences with a period.

A string of exclamation points is not only entirely wrong:

Get yours now!!!! Hurry!!!!!!

it is self-defeating. Remember the story of the little boy who cried "Wolf!"? The more you use it, the less meaning, the less value, it has. So don't.

The exclamation point should be reserved for personal correspondence, dialogue, and sales materials (but don't overdo it). It rarely, if ever, belongs in business letters.



HYPHEN -

Isn't that a strange-looking word?

The hyphen is very sociable punctuation. It's a *joiner*, and a close one at that. No space on either side.

1. Join numbers: twenty-one; thirty-nine; one-fifth; forty-eleven (Hike!)
2. Create *compound adjectives* that come immediately before the noun they modify.
 - Late-night meeting -or- Meeting late at night
 - State-of-the-art system -or- The system is state of the art
 - Up-to-date reports -or- The reports are up to date
3. Separating words into syllables at the end of a line (okay, the hyphen isn't *always* a joiner – gimme a break!). If you can avoid hyphenation, I recommend it. If you're using full justification, which I'm not, you won't have much choice, but you can set the breaks. Don't break the word until you absolutely must – meaning leave as many syllables as possible on the first line. It's easier to read and looks better:
 - Dis- continuation is okay
 - Discon- tinuation is better
 - Discontin- uation is even better

Never leave just one or two letters of a word on a line; move the whole word to the next line, justification notwithstanding. If the last word of the last sentence of your work ends up being hyphenated, rewrite the sentence until it isn't.

4. Certain prefixes require a hyphen, but most don't. (Another English rule built on a foundation of solid Jell-O.) If the word or the prefix is capitalized, use a hyphen.
 - A-frame, U-boat, non-English

The prefixes *all-*, *ex-*, and *self-* almost always require a hyphen.

- all-inclusive*, *ex-husband*, *self-absorbed*

When the prefix *ends* with the same letter that *starts* the word, a hyphen is often needed:

- anti-intellectual, de-emphasize

but not always:

- unnatural, cooperate

Got that dictionary handy?



(PARENTHESES)

Parentheses are the semicircular marks enclosing the word above. Parentheses is the plural of parenthesis, suggesting that one such mark is a parenthesis, and that a pair—the most common use—is parentheses. Glad we could clear that up; I feel better.

1. Use parentheses to enclose nonessential material: minor digressions (my favorite), asides, afterthoughts, and the occasional smart aleck remark (another favorite).

The Senator (after a very long pause) finally said she couldn't recall the details. Roberta (she says she's not a "Bobbi") was pleased to be invited.

2. Supplemental or clarifying information can be placed inside parentheses.

Damon sold his old computer for five hundred dollars (\$500.00).

Lee said she needed a half-pound (eight ounces) of sharp cheddar cheese.

3. You can use parentheses to enclose the numbers or letters delineating items in a series.

Gwen said her favorite actors included (1) Harrison Ford, (2) Sean Connery, (3) Al Pacino, and (4) Bruce Willis.

Or, you can use just the right parenthesis mark, like so:

Mark listed his favorite stars as 1) Nicole Kidman, 2) Halle Berry, 3) Sharon Stone, and 4) Miss October. Gwen clobbered him.

It's good to be flexible, isn't it?



QUOTATION MARKS “ ”

In my beloved country, the United States of America, the rule is that commas and periods go *inside* the final quotation marks, irrespective of logic. I frequently have to fight my impulse to do otherwise. Here's the reason for the rule:

Long, long ago, the little pieces of metal type used in the printing process were somewhat fragile. The slugs for the period and the comma were the most delicate, followed by the quotation marks. So, if the printer had " or ", followed by a blank space (that offered no support), he'd probably have a problem with a slug breaking. So, for typographical reasons, the comma and period were moved inside the quotation marks. And, there they remain, even unto this very day.

Please note that this rule applies *only* in the US of A, and does *not* apply to colons, semicolons, exclamation points, or question marks. Our cousins in the rest of the English-speaking world use a different approach, with the commas and periods on whichever side of the quotation marks is appropriate. Don't bet on this changing in your lifetime—or your kids', either.

1. **Direct Quotations** are enclosed in quotation marks, but **indirect quotations** are not.

“This is great!”, Chris said excitedly. “I graduated first in my class!” *direct*

Chris said it was great to graduate first in his class. *indirect*

“Maybe you should run for office yourself.” Linda suggested *direct*

Linda said Frank should run for election himself. *indirect*

2. A **quotation within a quotation** is set off with *single* quotation marks.

“Richard Lederer said, ‘A word that means one thing today might mean another tomorrow.’”, he added.

The instructor said, “William Zinsser wrote, ‘Writing is thinking on paper, or talking to someone on paper.’, and is not mysterious at all.”

3. Use quotation marks around the **titles** of songs, poems, short stories, magazine or newspaper articles, television or radio programs and book chapters.

Edgar Allen Poe's “The Raven” inspired spirited discussion in the group.

I missed “Law and Order” last night; I fell asleep early.

Note: The titles of books are customarily underlined. The names of movies, plays, newspapers and magazines are put in *italics*. If you're writing in plain text, you have a problem—it's very limiting.

4. Using quotation marks for **emphasis, irony, or special meaning**: This is thin ice territory. Without considerable caution, you may convey the opposite of what you intended. Words used as words may be set off with quotation marks, although *italics* is generally preferred.

The words “their” and “there” are often confused. (words as words)

The words *their* and *there* are often confused. (words as words)

The sign over the heat lamp said “Fresh” French Fries. (actually fresh or not?)

5. A *question mark* and or *exclamation point* goes inside the quotation marks, as appropriate. If it applies to the whole sentence, however, it goes outside the quotation marks. Neither mark is ever duplicated at the end of a sentence. Perfectly clear? I heard that!

Do you remember the television show “What’s My Line?”? (wrong)

Do you remember the television show “What’s My Line”? (right)

Do you watch that quiz show “Jeopardy!”? (right – no duplication)



SEMICOLON ;

The semicolon is certainly a useful punctuation mark, it just always seemed like a hybrid to me. Come to think of it, I guess it is. Stronger than a comma, it could have been called a supercomma, or a maxicomma. Catchy, right? Oh, well ...it was a victim of its time, I suppose.

So, about using the semicolon:

1. Two *closely related*, independent sentences can be connected with a semicolon. Note that there is no coordinating conjunction.

Carlos ate lunch with gusto; Maria said she wasn't hungry.

Emily wanted to stop at the new photo gallery; Roger preferred to go home.

Emily appreciates excellent photos as art; Roger isn't convinced they're art

2. Use a semicolon between independent clauses linked by a conjunctive adverb or transitional phrase. A semicolon precedes the conjunctive adverb, and a comma should follow it.

Common Conjunctive Adverbs

accordingly, afterwards, also, certainly, consequently, conversely, finally, however, incidentally, indeed, instead, meanwhile, next, otherwise, similarly, specifically, then, therefore, thus

Common Transitional Phrases

after all, as a matter of fact, as a result, even so, for example, for instance, in addition, in conclusion, in other words, on the contrary, on the other hand

Maria was intent on opening her new gallery; indeed, she was working long hours.

Roger already had three profitable businesses; even so, he was considering another opportunity.

All Carlos's work results from his great his reputation; however, there are some empty periods he'd like to fill.



3. Use a semicolon to separate items in a series containing commas.

We now have offices in New York, NY; Baltimore, MD; Atlanta, GA; and Miami, FL.

The coach posted changes in the line-up that included Chip Flippet, shortstop; Rhino Neandra, right tackle; Tats Google, forward; and Guido Spongaballi, striker.



SLASH /

Just to keep things interesting (I heard that), this mark is also known as a **solidus**, **stroke**, **diagonal** or **virgule**. Call it whatever you like. For Internet purposes, it is a **slash**.

The slash, as punctuation rather than part of a URL, can be interpreted as *or* – and should not be used when *or* can be.

Some people use the slash to avoid gender problems – or political problems – with pronouns. They write *he/she* or *his/her*. I've done it, too, but most authorities frown, even snarl, at such construction. They urge using either *he or she*, or a plural pronoun (*they*, *their*, *them*). Frankly, this drives me crazy. What English needs is a good genderless singular pronoun. Got any ideas? No, "it" doesn't make it.

The place where The Authorities smile on using the slash, is as a line break when quoting poetry:

'The time has come,' the Walrus said, /
'To talk of many things: /
Of shows – and ships –
and sealing wax -- /
Of cabbages and kings -- /
And why the sea is boiling hot -- /
And whether pigs have wings.'

No space on either side of the slash, thank you.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

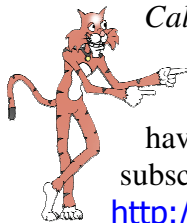


Kent “The Nitpicker” Butler is an entrepreneur, writer and editor of more years’ experience than he usually cares to remember. From his days as a radio personality to a career in sales, management and training sales people; from writing training materials, all manner of sales copy and advertising materials, articles and columns, to ebooks, he has been a student of the art of communication.

When he became involved in the Internet, Kent was at first amused, then dismayed, and, finally, appalled that so much of the writing he found – both in newsletters and websites – especially in newsletters and ezines, was so badly in need of improvement. He does not claim to be an “expert” so much as a practical writer/editor. He cheerfully ignores some of the rules -- like always placing periods and commas *inside* the quotation marks, whether they belong there or not. He believes clearly conveying the message is the most important thing.

Eventually, he was invited to edit the newsletter of his favorite business organization, the International Council of Online Professionals (iCop), of which he is a Founding Member. (Please see <http://www.i-cop.org/ref.cgi?id=Nitpicker>) Founder and Executive Director jl Scott began calling him “The Nitpicker”, and the nickname stuck. He also provides editorial services to NSI Solutions, Inc. (Please see <http://www.NetServeInt.com>)

Kent has other interests, of course:



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