

Ben Stanford



# Stop Ignoring Punctuation!

How to use every clue in the text to your advantage.

# Before We Get Started

Remember to register your attendance and complete session evaluations.

- ▶ Session numbers are in your program.



**Attendance**



**Online Handouts**



**Session Evaluations**

# Why is Punctuation Useful?

"LET'S EAT, GRANDPA!"  
"LET'S EAT GRANDPA!"  
COMMAS SAVE LIVES.

- But...what about for ACTORS?

# Why is Punctuation Useful for Actors?

- Punctuation can be different for playscripts than it is for “regular” English.
- Many playwrights use punctuation differently.
- Regardless, it is the writer **communicating** with the actor about:
  - who this character is
  - how they relate to the world around them
  - the nuance of that character’s mental state.

# Why is Punctuation Useful for Actors?

Punctuation is how an actor groups their words together so listeners can comprehend a whole thought.

How words are grouped provides a rhythm. The rhythm provides motion. Motion leads to emotion.

Finally, all these elements form a character, a recognizable personality.

- From *Will Power*, by John Basil

## Why is Punctuation Useful for Actors?

- The best actors use every clue in the script to their advantage.
- You don't have to create "deep" meaning for every punctuation mark.
- Instead, build a habit.
- Punctuation can act as anchor points in pace, meaning, emotion, etc.

# Periods

- Full stop.
- The end of a thought.
- Often downward inflection.
- Certainty. Intention.
- More thought-out.
- **Stomp**

■  
“I know you went in there.”

# Commas

- Part of a list, a series of thoughts.
- Groups related ideas together, with one main thought throughout.
- Small shift.
- Often upward inflection.
- **Snap**

,

“I always wanted, you know, to be the best.”



# Question Marks

- Full stop.
- Asking a question.
  - (not the only way to ask a question)
- Often upward inflection.
- Intention.
- **Stomp-Snap**



“Were you coming next week then?”

# Exclamation Points

- Full stop.
- Vigor, intensity, passion!
- Not necessarily louder.
- Certainty. Intention.
- Possible spontaneity.
- **Stomp-Clap**



“I told you not to let them in!”

# Ellipses

- Trailing off.
- Lost in thought.
- Thought interrupted by another thought.
- Slower pace.
- Lack of confidence.
- **Pat-Pat-Pat**



“I was hope...hoping to tell you...earlier...”

# Dashes

- Interjection.
- Interruption or cut off.
- A breakaway in thought.
- Often upward inflection.
- **Clap**

“But I couldn’t—there was no—”

# Colons

- Guiding the listener.
- Presenting a thought.
- Rhetorical or formal.
- Often upward inflection.
- **Double-Pat**

“I need you to understand: one victim, two murder weapons. It doesn’t make sense.”

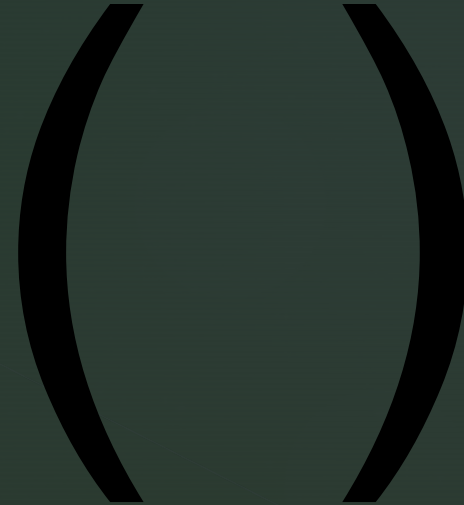
# Semi-colons

- Blend between a comma and a colon.
- Thought shifter. ■
- More thought out and formal than a comma.
- Upward inflection. ;
- **Double-Pat-Snap**

“I felt hopeless as a dying star; hollow as a black hole.”

# Parenthesis

- Subtext.
- Clarification.
- Aside.
- Sometimes unspoken.
- **Swipe**



“I’m fine. (but please leave me alone)”

# Forward Slashes

- Next line interrupts.
- Sometimes included with other punctuation

JANE

I was trying to tell you my father was / coming, you wouldn't listen—

TRACY

You weren't trying to tell me anything, you were buying time.





# No Punctuation

- On the end of a line: unfinished, fractured, interrupted.
- Lack of inflection.
- Rushed.
- Reckless, sloppy.
- Stream of consciousness.
- Less certainty.

"It wasn't me I didn't even see it cuz it was never really just trust me it was never an issue"



## Now, All of Them Together...

- You know, I used to think—...I always thought you were on my side.
- You think you can just walk up to me? Huh? That's insane! You're insane, pal!



# Practice

JESSE

River walks up to me and she acts like she doesn't know me. She isn't afraid you know how she is right like never afraid? And it sucks, because that means she's—

TAYLOR

Chill out!

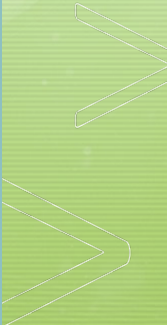
JESSE

She's not afraid to act like she doesn't know me; like she never knew me...





## Notice the Difference?

- I really wish I could. I know you'd let me go.
  - I really wish I could, I know you'd let me go.
  - I really wish I could: I know you'd let me go.
  - I really wish I could—I know you'd let me go—
- 

## Notice the Difference?

- But I really wish I could; I know you'd let me.
- But I really wish I could! I know you'd let me!
- But I really wish I could? I know you'd let me?
- But I really wish I could I know you'd let me
- But I really wish I could...I know you'd let me...

## Monologues and Scenes in the Handout

- Read it out loud one time, just read.
- Read it out loud a second time, doing every punctuation action.
- Read it out loud one more time, performing.
  - Add in punctuation actions if you'd like.



Thank You Everyone!