



A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation

Noah Lukeman

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The first practical and accessible guide to the art of punctuation for creative writers. Punctuation reveals the writer: haphazard commas, for example, reveal haphazard thinking; clear, lucid breaks reveal clear, lucid thinking. Punctuation can be used to teach the writer how to think and how to write. This short, practical book shows authors the benefits that can be reaped from mastering punctuation: the art of style, sentence length, meaning, and economy of words. There are full-length chapters devoted to the period, the comma, the semicolon, the colon, quotation marks, the dash and parentheses, the paragraph and section break, and a cumulative chapter on integrating them all into "The Symphony of Punctuation." Filled with exercises and examples from literary masters (Why did Poe and Melville rely on the semicolon? Why did Hemingway embrace the period?), *A Dash of Style* is interactive, highly engaging, and a necessity for creative writers as well as for anyone looking to make punctuation their friend instead of their mysterious foe.

A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation Details

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From Reader Review **A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation** for online ebook

Daniel Ionson says

Short, but with some unique insights on the mess called punctuation. I especially liked his exploration of the subjectivity of punctuation use.

Elizabeth says

A total page-turner. Really.

Dana Delamar says

An excellent book on punctuation, including the use of paragraph, section, and chapter breaks. This book would be especially useful for writers who are just starting out. The book has a literary fiction bent, but the rules Lukeman espouses are useful for all writers. Note that this is not a "how to" book and is a bit light on examples; Lukeman assumes you have a decent grasp of grammar and mechanics and are instead looking for guidelines to turn that basic understanding into artful application.

Rachel says

A good reminder that punctuation is our friend in the midst of creative texts. Of course, the book seems aimed at an intro class and there was next to no discussion of poetry, but it was an interesting enough book to pick up from time to time over the course of a month. If I taught fiction-writing (or creative non-fiction), I'd totally assign this book.

Cari says

"In writing, punctuation plays the role of body language. It helps readers hear you the way you want to be heard." -Russell Baker

Aimed at creative writers (although useful for non-fiction, technical, and business), [A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation](#) is an excellent resource, one I highly recommend aspiring writers add to their bookshelves. This is not a manual; this is a guide to considering punctuation before throwing it into work without forethought, using it just because instead of using it as part of an individual style.

Lukeman tackles each punctuation mark in turn, devoting a chapter to each. Sounds boring, I know, but again, this isn't a manual or a grammar school book. Lukeman expects his reader to be more advanced than that; he expects you to already know what each mark is and what it's technically used for. As the title

implies, this is a guide to style. And if you're a writer who's investigating tips for developing your own style, then you're most likely advanced enough that you already know punctuation marks and their technical usage. (If you don't, for God's sake start by learning the basics!) You don't need an English teacher assuming you're some kind of idiot, you need a guiding hand beyond the schoolbook definitions that will push you in the direction of better overall writing.

A Dash of Style provides exactly that: guidance towards developing and bettering your writing with the thoughtful use of punctuation. Lukeman emphasizes context: allowing the context to determine which marks to use and where to use them, when one choice would work but another would work better within the text, and when context would render certain ones inappropriate. He also covers things like paragraphs and section and chapter breaks, not technically punctuation but just as crucial to the flow of text. Again, he places much of the focus on context and writing for impact.

A note on the entirety: this is *not* a boring book. Many excellent grammar and/or style guides can be dry, acting as excellent cures for insomnia, but this isn't one of those. Noah Lukeman keeps the pace quick and to the point, and his writing is engaging. The vibrant text also refreshes, as it never insults the reader's intelligence. God bless him.

A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation is an excellent read and a must-have addition for any writer's collection. And if you read this, I also highly recommend another of his books, The First Five Pages: A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile. Now go! Read! And then write your little hearts out!

Robert Beveridge says

Noah Lukeman, **A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation** (Norton, 2006)

Noah Lukeman's three writing guides (*The First Five Pages*, *The Plot Thickens*, and this one) are wonderful little oases of good, old-fashioned common sense in a twisted thicket of how-to-write tomes. They are small, to the point, and quietly sure of themselves. They can be; the information contained therein is impeccable. If you haven't discovered Lukeman yet and you're an aspiring writer of any fictional stripe (and aren't we all?), hie thee to the bookstore, library, whatever and grab yourself a copy of *The First Five Pages*, about which I cannot say enough good things (though I tried when reviewing it a few years back). You can grab the other two in either order, I think.

This is a straight punctuation book; Lukeman starts with the most commonly-used punctuation marks, gives a quick overview of when they should (and shouldn't) be used, and then heads into more esoteric territory. All of it is good reads, even if you actually know most of this stuff heading into it. I did, and this still ended up being my favorite of the three; Lukeman is concise, witty, and a lot of fun without going over the top (as, say, Lynne Truss). *****

Yaaresse says

This wasn't exactly what I thought it would be, but once I committed to it, I felt like I should go ahead and finish it. It's a quick read.

My tentatively positive first impression quickly slid into "meh" before disintegrating into thoughts of "this time could be spent doing something more interesting, such as sorting rubber bands by color."

Obviously, I'm not the audience. That's probably the first problem. The second disconnect is that, while I believe the English language is fluid (and that fluidity extends to punctuation), I'm not in favor of non-standard punctuation in the name of "style." As the author points out, there are authors who have brilliantly twisted the rules of punctuation to suit their needs--pages of text without a single period, books without a single comma, etc. -- but, as the author also points out (over and over and over again), not everyone is Neville, Hemingway, or Barrett-Browning. (Thank goodness for that.) Probably the third disconnect with me was that I thought the sections on "what it says about you if you use too much/too little of X punctuation" was simplistic and had a barbed, nasty tone to it. I was reminded of a former teacher who used to make snide remarks about students' papers in front of the class. #NotHelpful.

On the plus side, the sample paragraphs used prompted me to add Faulkner to my "to read" list.

Aleksandr Voinov says

One of my top five authors on writing. Eye-opening guide on punctuation.

Steven Veach says

I love it when two writing books disagree on something. Such as, one book argues you should never use "quotes" around a single word to make it stand out, as if it were italicized. Then the next book states this is perfectly fine, as long as you don't abuse it. This is why, when I want to learn something new, I gather together a dozen or more books on the subject and read through them, taking notes, etc. You can't take any one person's opinion as fact on anything.

Overall, though, *A Dash of Style* was a pretty good book on punctuation. Not exactly what I was looking for; maybe a little too wordy in some places. If you are a beginner at writing or developing your craft, you would be aided by this book. It did help me clarify a few places where I struggle. But I wouldn't spend money on it. Find it in a library or online somewhere. I'm sure Amazon has it for a penny. I'm glad I got through this one, hopefully the next book will be better.

Janean Easley says

I learned some valuable tips in this book.

Janett Wawrzyniak says

This book is for creative writers. This means writers of fiction, non-fiction, memoir, poetry, and screenplays, including anyone seeking to write well, for business, school or any other endeavor. This book offers punctuation as artistic expression. As a means of impacting the content in a most profound way.

Punctuation can influence the reading experience, to craft a finer work. This book will teach you to become sensitive, enabling you to be a better writer. It is not about making you a better grammarian. This book teaches how punctuation reveals the writer, and ways to tap in to alter intention of a scene, and much more. Strengths in writing can be spotted by the method of punctuation. This book would be a wealth of wisdom to any library. I own a copy of this inspiring book.

Kay Sterner says

This book takes a refreshing spin on punctuation -- I think it freed me from my overly-strict 5th grade grammar teacher.

Sean Keogh says

Thank you, Betsy. This book has reinvigorated my approach to punctuation. The tenth grade doesn't know it yet but they will owe you a big "thank you".

Jennet says

This is a great book for anyone who writes on the side or for a living. I never thought about punctuation before in my writing - I just relied on experience and intuition - but this book really breaks down the creative and functional uses of different punctuation. I will definitely reference this again.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

This book is unique. A book about punctuation, but it doesn't deal with grammar; this isn't a book about rules, but about creative choices, about how the use of commas, periods and semi-colon builds a narrative, how to use colons, dashes, parenthesis and quotation marks with flair, and why you should use punctuation such the question mark and the exclamation point with caution--a book for the fiction writer, not a grammarian. It even treats such subjects as the paragraph and section break in creative writing.

Just before this, I read and reviewed another book on fiction writing. In that other book, a lot of things eroded its credibility: jarring political bias, shameless self-promotion, frequent mistakes. But most of all, it just wasn't all that well-written. In looking to a book to improve writing, you're looking for someone who can speak with authority. In fiction writing it helps if they're either a successful well-known writer or if they're a gatekeeper. Lukeman, a top literary agent, qualifies. But more than that, the authority flows from *his* style and organization. The blurbs for once are true: Lukeman wrote a book about punctuation that's a page-turner, one written with "wit and insight."

I certainly learned a lot. I'm far too fond of the dash--I know it. But part of that might have been not so much that I used the dash too much, but that I didn't appreciate its close cousins the parenthesis and the colon and how they work differently. Lukeman gives frequent literary examples, for instance how Hemingway used the period differently than Faulkner, how Poe and Melville used the semi-colon, James Joyce the colon, E.M.

Forster the dash. Each chapter deals with a punctuation mark or closely related marks, with their use, underuse, overuse, context, what your usage reveals about you and ends with exercises that help bring the lessons home and should be very useful in revision. A short, lucid book, and an essential tool in a fiction writer's kit.
