Parentheses

Use parentheses if you are

1. Including information as an aside
   - Kyle (who weighs 95 pounds) ate 52 hot dogs.

2. Citing in-text.
   - Hot dogs are only 52% meat (Nathans, 32).

Question Marks

Use a question mark if you are

1. Asking a direct question
   - What is your name?

Quotation Marks

Use quotation marks if you are

1. Quoting directly
   - My source said that “dolphins are smarter than humans.”

2. Inserting dialogue
   - Flipper asked his friend, “Were you accepted at MIT?”
Periods

Use a period if you are

1. Completing a sentence
   - Sean bought her a present.
2. Completing a request.
   - Thank you.

Commas

Use a comma if you are

1. Connecting two independent thoughts with a conjunction.
   - I ran to the store, but they were out of milk.
2. Using an introductory phrase
   - After I got to the store, I sat down and cried.
3. Inserting a dependent clause
   - The curb, which was hard and uncomfortable, was not a nice seat.
4. Listing.
   - At the store I needed milk, eggs, bread, and party cups.

Hyphens

Use a hyphen if you are

1. Connecting a compound word or phrase
   - double-check, run-of-the-mill
2. Breaking a word into syllables (perhaps to show pronunciation)
   - Kin-der-gar-ten
3. Connecting numbers.
   - Twenty-two

Dash

Use a dash if you are

1. Showing a break in thought
   - This is an example—never tickle live dragons.
2. Set apart a list
   - If you an encounter a dragon, bring the following—a shield, a fire extinguisher, and a steak.
3. Clarifying
   - The knights—Carl, Jason, and Mike—were very brave.

Semi-colon

Use a semi-colon if you are

1. Separating independent thoughts
   - I prefer dogs to cats; dogs love you back.
2. Listing items that have commas
   - My dog has been to Orlando, FL; Albany, NY; and Albuquerque, NM.
3. Linking clauses connected by transitional phrases
   - Cats are lazy and mean; however, kittens are terribly cute.

Colon

Use a colon if you are

1. Preparing to list
   - I will address the following issues: haircuts, baggy pants, and sloppy shoes.
2. Separating an introductory phrase
   - Here is the main point: you look like a mess.