

# Introduction Shakespeare's Punctuation

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Punctuation marks are like a musical score. They tell you when to pause, breathe, add clarity to the meaning of the line and give clues as to emotional state. Ideally breathing in the middle of a line is to be avoided, but punctuation can allow us to do without the losing sense or clarity of thought.

It is important to note that the punctuation found in most editions of Shakespeare, like the Arden, Penguin, Folger, or Dover, is not the punctuation Shakespeare wrote. He didn't often use punctuation, and the closest we believe we can get to what he actually wrote is the Folio. Punctuation was added later by editors for clarity and is a topic of constant debate.

Begin by FULLY observing the punctuation (like we begin with a regular verse line in scansion), and consult other editions to solidify the punctuation you're using is the best/clearest possible option, or to clarify the phrasing and stress you are using is the best/clearest possible option.

## Full Stops (.?!)

- Indicate the end of the thought.
- If at the end of a verse line, take a full breath.
- If in the middle of a verse line, take a quick breath.
- Finish the thought and begin the next.
- Don't let the thought end until you reach a full stop no matter how long the thought!

## Commas ( , )

- Link mini thoughts, or small thought chunks.
- Can use for catch breaths, especially at the end of the verse line.
- In the middle of a line, lift thought and keep energy up.

## Colons and Semi-colons ( : ; )

- Mark the end of a phrase of thought, but not the main idea.
- Shift in energy and separate from the previous thought.
- Short breath
- Think of colons as "therefore" or "because", and semi-colons as "and".

## Parenthetical Phrases

- Denotes a digression to a new, clarifying thought, then returning to the original thought.
- Could be removed from text without changing the meaning of the line/thought.
- Digression set apart or made different by a change in speed or pitch.
- Indicated by parenthesis, (), or commas.
- Can take a catch breath at the beginning, end or both