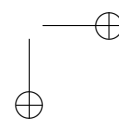
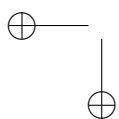
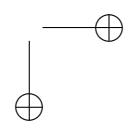
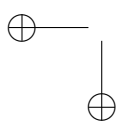
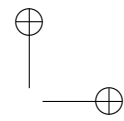
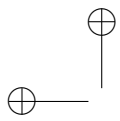
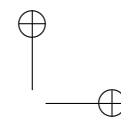


ON YOUR MARKS
A PACKAGE OF PUNCTUATION





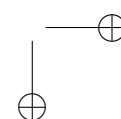
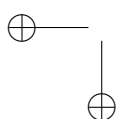


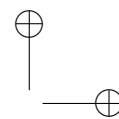
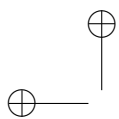
ON YOUR MARKS
A PACKAGE OF PUNCTUATION

Richard Armour

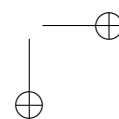
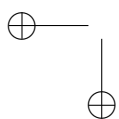
With an Introduction by
Ogden Nash

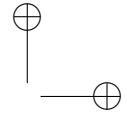
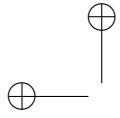
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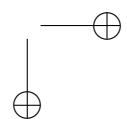
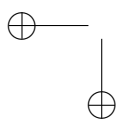
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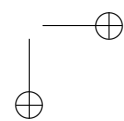
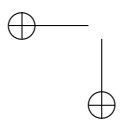
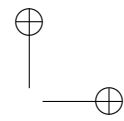
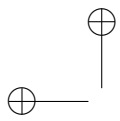


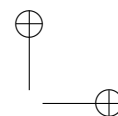
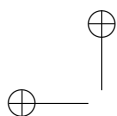


DEDICATED

to Aldus Manutius, the father
of modern punctuation, and to everyone
who can tell a comma from a coma.





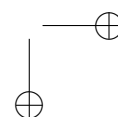
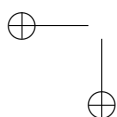


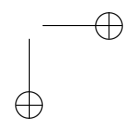
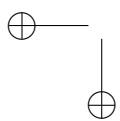
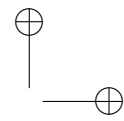
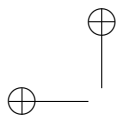
INTRODUCTION BY OGDEN NASH

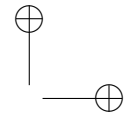
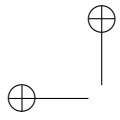
How much punctuation is just enough? E.E. Cummings sometimes used too much, Archy too little, both with prodigious results. But those of us who are neither unorthodox geniuses nor cockroaches will do better to observe the rules if we wish our written words to mean what we intend them to mean. I don't know how many fat, greedy poodles or lazy, supercilious Persians have come into a handsome sum at the expense of a worthy and impoverished rightful heir because of a comma misplaced or omitted in a will, but I'll wager more than there are apostrophes in this sentence.

Now that this simple guidebook is available there is no excuse for losing your way in the tanglewood of punctuation. Richard Armour is a master of his craft – ingenious, witty, and many-faceted – whose verses I have admired and envied for many years. Here he has given to one long known to editors as the most reckless and least punctilious of punctuators a swift and painless education in this essential phase of his profession. The rhymes are terse and memorable, the reasons clearly stated and easy to comprehend. No longer shall I ignorantly employ a – for a : or () for []. And I am happy to find that there is still a use for the *, which I thought had become obsolete after the court decisions involving *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Tropic of Cancer*.

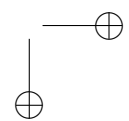
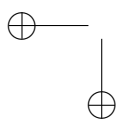
Richard Armour's delightful little book of shrewd advice is just the thing for today's generation of aspiring writers and not too late, I hope, for yesterday's.

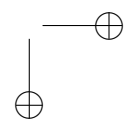
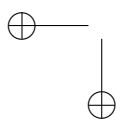
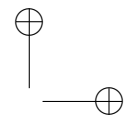
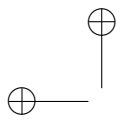


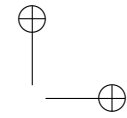
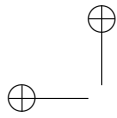




ON YOUR MARKS



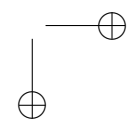
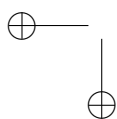


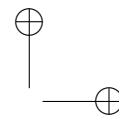
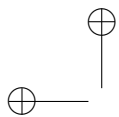


Here's a gallery, a zoo,
A punctuation mark Who's Who.
Each mark, as you will shortly see,
Possesses personality:
It's fat or thin, it's bent or straight,
It lives alone or has a mate,
It simply sits, flies like a bird,
Dwells over, under, by a word. . .

Each has its special job, its chore,
Each knows precisely what it's for,
And you should never, never ask
One mark to do another's task!
A comma, thus, should not be sent for
To do what periods are meant for;
Apostrophes are not amused
When they're omitted or misused;
And dashes, though they're full of zest,
Grow tired of dashing – need to rest.

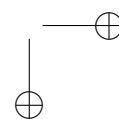
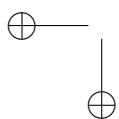
Quotation marks, parentheses
(And asterisks) aren't hard to please.
The same is true of underlining
And semicolons, seldom whining,
And colons, brackets, and ellipses,
“As carefree as [a band of] gypsies.”
The caret bears upon its head
A left-out ^{word} _^, and nothing's said.
The hard-put hyphen's uncomplaining.
The question mark (like the remaining
Quotation marks and exclamation)
Would ask but your cooperation.
Some things you do to them, how could you?
You wouldn't hurt their feelings, would you?

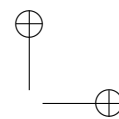
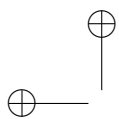




Well, here they are, good friends to know.
So on your marks, get set, and go!*

*All of the sixteen marks described in this book are used, some of them several times, in the above lines. Can you find them?

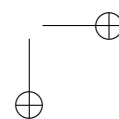
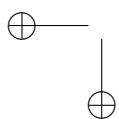


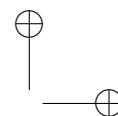
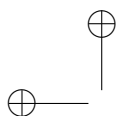


THE PERIOD

Fat little period, round as a ball,
You'd think it would roll,
But it doesn't
At all.
Where it stops,
There it plops,
There it stubbornly stays,
At the end of a sentence
For days and days.

"Get out of my way!"
Cries the sentence. "Beware!"
But the period seems not to hear or to care.
Like a stone in the road,
It won't budge, it won't bend.
If it spoke, it would say to a sentence,
"The end."





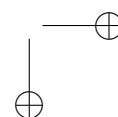
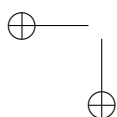
THE COMMA

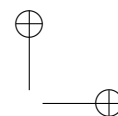
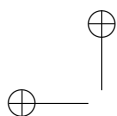
Consider the comma, most used of all marks.
In back of a word,
You will notice,
It parks
And waits for the reader and tells him to pause
Before, let us say,
He begins a new clause.

Its head on the line and its tail hanging down,
It looks like a polliwog trailing a noun,
And, having no arms,
There it clings by its chin,
Amidst the fat words looking tiny and thin.

Yet small though it is,
It shows lion-like heart
In keeping two parts of a sentence apart
And helping the reader, down wordways careening,
Get just the right emphasis,
Just the right meaning.

It doesn't say, "Stop!"
It says, "Caution" or "Slow,"
And this can be very important, you know.



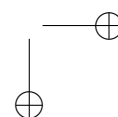
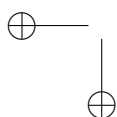


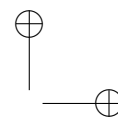
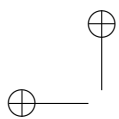
THE SEMICOLON

The semicolon we happily hail,
With its period head and its comma tail;
Or is it a seal
In a circus pose,
With a ball that is balanced
On top of its nose?

Less a stop than a period,
More than a comma,
It's the end of an act, not the end of the drama;
It's a switch (not the end of the line) for a train;
It's the linking that links the two links of a chain.

Partly wall,
Partly bridge,
When one reads or one writes
It helps keep apart, but it also unites.
"I know what it is, how to use it," you boast;
If you honestly do, you are smarter than most.



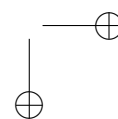
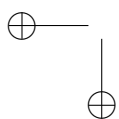


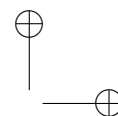
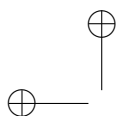
THE COLON

The colon by some is thought odd,
And no wonder:
Two periods make it,
One over,
One under.

The colon resembles the eyes of a beast:
A tiger,
A fox,
Or a tomcat at least –
Two eyes ever looking, two eyes open wide,
That belong to a creature that lies on its side.

Unable to point or to say, “Over there,”
All the colon can do,
And it does it,
Is stare.
So here’s a suggestion: go on, if you please,
To where it is looking, to see what it sees.





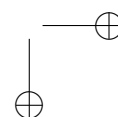
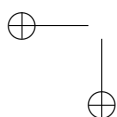
THE QUESTION MARK

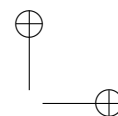
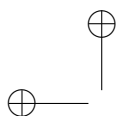
Why is a question mark?
What can it be?
Already you've two of them. How about three?
It looks like an acrobat perched on a ball
Who has to be nimble or else he will fall.
His legs come down straight,
But his back is a curve,
And keeping his balance
Takes talent
And nerve.
Or is it like smoke that comes lazily curling
From a blaze underneath in a ball that is twirling?

Or a hook used for hanging?
Or maybe a genie
Coming out of a bottle?
(The bottle is teeny.)

Whatever it looks like (have you a suggestion?),
The question mark raises (and lowers) a question.

No reason to scorn it or ever to doubt it.
This mark's made its mark.
Any question about it?





THE EXCLAMATION MARK (POINT)

Wham!

Bang!

Zowie!

Oh!

Here is a mark it's exciting to know.

If it's called not a mark but a point, this is why:

It points like a rocket right up at the sky,

A rocket just launched from its pad with a blast

And a *swish!* and a *swoosh!*

And it's rising fast!

It's slim

And it's trim

And it's soldier straight,

Like a guard that's on guard at a palace gate.

It's also like someone set free who was bound,

Now joyfully jumping a foot off the ground.

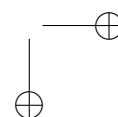
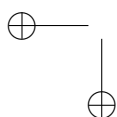
You find it with grim and you find it with gay,

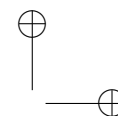
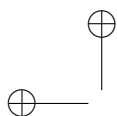
Not only with "Ouch!"

But, as often, "Hooray!"

It's not for a whisper, it's more for a shout,

So look for excitement when it is about!



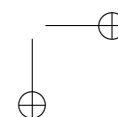
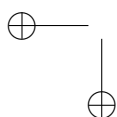


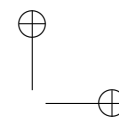
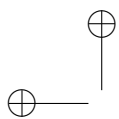
QUOTATION MARKS

It's said that quotation marks "look much like birds
That flutter before,
Also after, words."
(If you like this quotation and wish to give credit,
I'll have to confess, with a blush, that I said it.)
Quotation marks mostly, you'll find, fly in pairs,
But sometimes alone, as
He said, "I said, 'bears,'"
When something, as here you have probably noted,
Is quoted inside what is being quoted.

Or look at the front ones,
Then look at the rear:
Don't they look more like cheerleaders,
Leading a cheer?
Just watch them turn somersaults,
Pleasing the crowd,
And the cheers come up lusty
And gusty
And loud.

What you open with "quotes," whatsoever you do,
Have quotes at the end, for you close with them too.



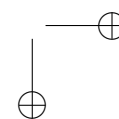
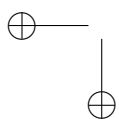


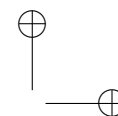
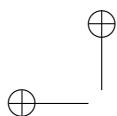
PARENTHESES

Come, peer at parentheses (close as you can).
Don't they look like the legs of a bowlegged man?
What manner of man?
Why, a cowboy, of course,
Whose legs have been bent by the sides of a horse.

But horsemen on *horses*
Ride rounding up herds,
While parentheses straddle
Not horses but words.
(Yes, firmly they saddle and tightly they rein
The words used to add
Or define
Or explain.)

One parenthesis left, one parenthesis right,
Two parentheses hold (like a vise) the words tight.
It's nice that parentheses make the words stay
So they're there when you get there.
(They *might* run away.)

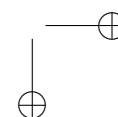
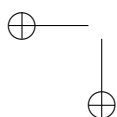


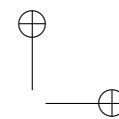
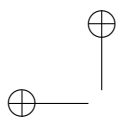


BRACKETS

Brackets are like a thin man and twin brother
Head to head,
Toe to toe,
Standing facing each other.
Though much like parentheses,
Brackets are squarer.
They're used when an editor
Edits an error.
For instance, "The mesengger [messenger] ran
To get some [word missing]
To hel[p] the poor man,"
And also for putting in facts, such as "He
[George Washington]
Chopped down a [cherry] tree."

You'll learn, if you type,
And it's bound to displease,
That brackets aren't found among typewriter keys.
You leave a small space
For each bracket and then
Go back and make brackets
With pencil or pen.
If you are a typist, thus treated unfairly,
Be grateful that brackets are used very rarely.



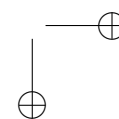
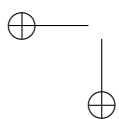


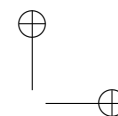
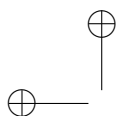
THE DASH

How dashing the dash is –
So straight and so narrow.
It aims at a word like a spear – or an arrow –
And luckily hasn't a point at one end
Or it might –
Just by accident –
Puncture a friend.

But don't call it pointless – it passes for many –
For comma, parentheses – just about any.
It dashes about with the greatest devotion.
It's blunt,
It's abrupt –
It creates a commotion.

It's used to gain emphasis, vigor, a touch
Of surprise – and it's also – by some –
Used too much.



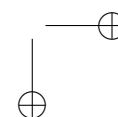
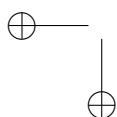


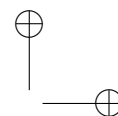
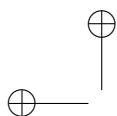
THE HYPHEN

Rated high is the hy-
Phen, a mark that's divine
When divid-
Ing a word
At the end of a line.
The hyphen itself is a line, like the dash.
It's an ex-dash, perhaps,
That got caught in the crash
And the clash and the mash
Of two close-pressing words
And was squeezed until shorter
By fully two thirds.

The dash is a wedge
But the hyphen's like glue,
Sticking this word to that,
Making one word of two.
It fixes prefixes
Like anti- and pro-
And fashions such phrases
As to-and-fro.

The dash may be longer, more dashing, exciting,
But the hy-
Phen's more use-
Ful in read-
Ing and writ-
Ing.

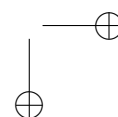
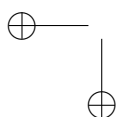


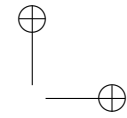
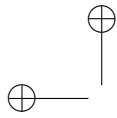


THE APOSTROPHE

If you look at it closely, you'll see, no denying,
An apostrophe's simply a comma that's flying.
Or, having no wings, like a salmon it's leaping;
It's up, and its altitude somehow it's keeping.
But the best it can do, at this height,
None too high,
Is to serve, as in "it's,"
When you're lacking an "i,"
Or tell you it's Molly's (her house)
Where they're playing,
Or help when it's "Top o' the mornin' "
You're saying.
(Or sayin' or playin', yes, either of these,
If you – let us hope not – are droppin' your g's.)

Though you know the apostrophe's
Never in "his,"
"It's" and "its" can be tricky
Unless you're a whiz.
This being a mark that's not easy to use,
While you're crossing your t's
Mind your p's and your q's.



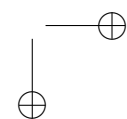
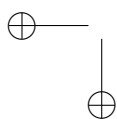


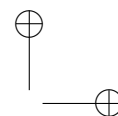
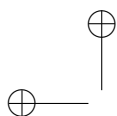
UNDERLINING

Underlining's a line that is under,
A sort
Of a floor that's supporting a word,
Long or short,
Or a tightrope a word seems to walk,
And no botching.
All eyes are upon it, and everyone's watching.

Underlining is the thing to use to suggest
That this word
Or that word's
The word to be stressed,
Or to show it's a title,
Like Better Expression,
But it can be – like dashes –
A writer's obsession.
Too much underlining, all over the place,
Will often bring lines to the poor reader's face.

So though it is useful and though it is fun,
Be sure underlining
Is not overdone.





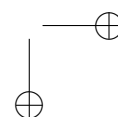
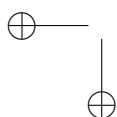
THE ASTERISK

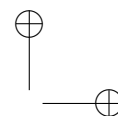
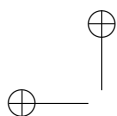
The asterisk looks like a spider, a spot,
A smudge, or a paw print, but really it's not.
It's a star that's so small that it seems very far,
But it's closer,
Much closer,
Than stars ever are.

"Look," says the asterisk,
"First look at me,
Then look at the bottom
And see what you see."*
At times, though, a row
Of asterisks stout
Is left in the **** ** where a word is left out.

Other stars may be bright
In the night
But I'd say
That the asterisk's bright***
Both by night
And by day.

* What you see, if you look, is a note such as this
That but for the asterisk, reader, you'd miss.
** Space
*** Intelligent, that is.



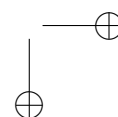
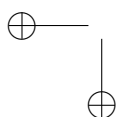


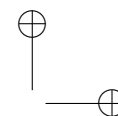
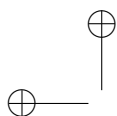
THE CARET

There's the carrot we eat
And the carat by which
We measure the diamonds
In rings of the rich.
And then there's the caret (one "r" and an "e"),
To writers most useful, I'm sure, of the three.

The caret is used when a word ^{is} inserted
On top of what looks like a V that's inverted.
Two legs at the bottom,
Its top sharp and narrow,
To some it may look
Like the head of ^{an} arrow;
To some like a tepee; to some, no less wise,
Like an eyebrow that's ^{lifted} in look of surprise.

Of this, I am sure, there can be little doubt:
The caret's wedged ⁱⁿ to let ⁱⁿ
What's left out.
It helps make corrections and changes in copy,
But looks, if you ask me
(Or don't), a ^{bit} sloppy.

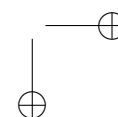
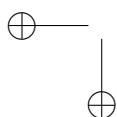


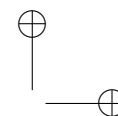
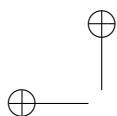


THE ELLIPSIS

Three little periods,
All in a row...
Make the ellipsis,
You probably know,
A mark you will find to be fittingly fitted
Where something, whatever it was, is omitted,
Or, bridging the space, to make up for the loss,
Three stepping stones... you can tiptoe across.

Four little periods
Often you'll find:
The three plus a period
Trailing behind....
Is a sentence unfinished and dwindling away?
The ellipsis suggests but it doesn't say,
Gives a hint, gives a clue, gives a bit of assistance,
Like footprints that disappear in the distance....





And now, your store of knowledge swollen,
You understand the ;
And, punctuation meadowlarks,
Those fore-and-aft “ ”.
While trying not to be too rash
With _____ and the -,
An ! you might
Use now and then, and write it right,
And when you're feeling really brisk,
Might even risk an * ,
Or, squeezing in some word of merit
You had forgotten, use a ^.
() and [] lean
You know the difference between,
And use the ! and ,
As well as, well, the Dalai Lama.
The : and ' ,
You recognize each time you see;
So also the ... and
The helpful -, well in hand.

And yet you've only started now
To learn what's what and why and how.
Henceforth you need to turn your looks
To other and to bigger books.
There you will find, of punctuation,
Its purpose and its application,
Along with many an example
And explanations more than ample
And uses – and exceptions – myriad...
Which brings us to our final.

