

Something about my Punctuation

For two to four people

-John Eagle, 2014 (revised 2018)

Text: Søren Kierkegaard

(from *The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard**, translated by Gerda M. Anderson, edited by Peter Rohde, with minor edits by the composer)

Requirements:

- a writing surface or surfaces with at least enough space to write in multiple locations (i.e. a large chalkboard or multiple chalkboards/chalk paper).
- a distinct, sustaining sound or sounds capable of varying degrees (i.e. amplitude, density, etc.). Each person may use the same set of sounds or a different set. If using the same set, they must be duplicated so that the source is different. These sounds may be acoustic or electronic, and may utilize additional people if desired.

Process:

There are four sections of text on the following page: A, B, C, D. Each person must memorize one or more sections, depending on the number of performers (no duplicates—each section should only be used once). Starting at any time and in any order, each person must write the entirety of their text exactly, from beginning to end, on the chalkboard. As space allows, people can write simultaneously in different sections of the writing surface. When commencing writing, each person may begin at any space on the surface, but must proceed in typical writing fashion—left to right and top to bottom. If one runs out of room, they may move to another part of the surface and continue, or erase someone else's text (not something being currently written—try not to interfere *too* much) and resume. Section A and D have more than one paragraph (separated by a line). The person writing those sections should pause between paragraphs for at least a moment (or longer) and, when they continue, resume writing in a different section (this also applies if one person is responsible for more than one section of text). The Section C writer should immediately finish their section with “-Søren Kierkegaard, 1847”.

Sound:

In addition to the sound of the writing, every time a punctuation mark (, ; : –) is reached (except a period or exclamation point), a sustaining sound must be activated. A different sound may be used for each type of punctuation or a single sound may be played with a different quality. In either case, sounds must be layered (growing in density) when a sentence contains more than one punctuation mark. When a period or exclamation point is reached, all sounds for that sentence stop immediately. This process is independent for each person writing, so up to four additive sound processes may be necessary simultaneously. When multiple punctuation marks of one type (i.e. multiple commas) are encountered in a single sentence, each additional iteration marks an increased degree of that sound (some type of accumulation).

* Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*. Ed. Peter P. Rohde. London: Owen, 1960. Print.

A:

In regard to spelling I bow unconditionally to Authority: it never occurs to me to investigate further, for I know that on this point I lack knowledge, wherefore I willingly admit that I believe every fair-to-middling author is perhaps more diligent in this respect than I.

Punctuation is something else again; in that I do not bow unconditionally to anyone, and I greatly doubt whether there is any author who can match me in that respect. My whole structure as a dialectician with an unusual sense of the rhetorical, my constant intercourse with my thoughts by silent conversations, my experience in reading aloud: all these must needs make me excel in this respect.

B:

That is why I make distinctions in my punctuation. In a scientific paper I use my punctuation differently from the way I use it in rhetorical writing. This probably already will be quite enough for most people, who only acknowledge one grammar. Unfortunately I do not really know any author who, in an ideal sense, pays proper attention to punctuation; they merely follow the grammatical norm. My punctuation deviates especially in rhetorical matters, because there it becomes more evolved. What particularly occupies me is the architectonic-dialectical phenomenon that the eye sees the structure of the sentences which at the same time, when one reads them aloud, becomes their rhythm—and in my mind's eye I always visualize a reader reading aloud.—That again is the reason why I sometimes use commas very sparingly. In this respect I keep up a constant feud with composers who, with the best intentions, put commas everywhere and by so doing disturb my rhythm.

C:

In my opinion most stylists use the period sign entirely erroneously. They cut up their discourse in nothing but short periods with the result that logic is deprived of the respect it should command, that sentences which logically are dependent instead become co-ordinated by each forming a period. Above all I must repeat that I imagine to myself readers reading aloud and therefore well versed in following the vibration of every thought into its last recess, and also are able to recreate this with the voice. Abstract, grammatical punctuation in no way suffices when it comes to the Rhetorical, particularly if this is spiced with a dash of the Ironical, the Epigrammatic, the Subtle, and what, in the sense of the idea, would be the Malicious, et cetera.

-Søren Kierkegaard, 1847

D:

There are many people who arrive at the result of their lives like schoolboys; they cheat their teacher by copying the answer from the key in the arithmetic-book, without bothering to do the sums themselves.

One thought chases the next; no sooner have I thought it and am about to write it down than a new one comes along—hold it, grasp it—Madness—Insanity!

According to our contemporary way of thinking one would have expected that the Lord would at least have waited to let himself be born until the art of printing had been invented, that until then the fullness of time had not arrived, and that he would then have secured one or two high-speed printing presses.