

## Don't forget the basics.

We are all great fans of Word, of styles and of word recognition and predictive text software. If we're not big fans, then we do at least recognise that they have made our lives a touch simpler and have probably supported our overall efficiency.



Some die-hards may say that this clever technology has dumbed-down years of hard-won experience and opened the floodgates to the less learned and the less experienced.

We are where we are, and so a gentle acceptance is needed, and let us still take some heart that an understanding of the basics is also going to be vital, and it is often the smallest of critters that remind us of that. In our world, of course, the humblest of those critters is our friend, the comma.

Punctuation is a very precise skill, needing clear understanding and a very good sense of context, and the need to ensure that the intended meaning is expressed well.

There are many excellent examples of misplaced commas changing meanings entirely.

### Here is a topical one:

- The Democrats say the Republicans will lose the election.
- The Democrats, say the Republicans, will lose the election.

### Here is one that could cause some mess:

- Do not break your bread or roll in your soup.
- Do not break your bread, or roll in your soup

### If we want to add a colon, then here's one to cause a smile amongst many:

- A woman without her man is nothing.
- A woman: without her, man is nothing.

All very amusing, but let us have sympathy for the person who drafted this:

***The canning, processing, preserving, freezing, drying, marketing, storing, packing for shipment or distribution of:***

- (1) Agricultural produce;***
- (2) Meat and fish products; and***
- (3) Perishable foods.***

The absence of our wee critter after the word 'shipment' led to the conclusion that only 'packing' was relevant for 'shipment or distribution' and was to be regarded as a single activity for the purpose of either shipping or distribution. This was upheld by a Judge in Maine which helped support overtime claims for 75 drivers.

So, do not worry about software making our lives easier – rejoice that it is still the little things that matter.