

# BrainPOP Related Reading - Colons



How far back does the colon go in the history of punctuation marks? All the way to the beginning! As early as the 5th century B.C.E., some of the most famous writers in Ancient Greece, including the playwrights Euripides and Aristophanes, used vertically arranged dots to indicate the ends of spoken phrases in their written plays.

A few centuries later, around 200 B.C.E., a different Greek named Aristophanes—this one was the head librarian of the Library of Alexandria—came up with a whole system of dot-based punctuation marks, not to mention the actual terms “colon,” “comma,” and “period.” But Aristophanes’ system wasn’t very popular, and was quickly forgotten. For the next 1,600 years, punctuation in written texts was either random or nonexistent—which wasn’t too much of a problem, since the average person didn’t read all that much.



That all changed during the 15th century, when German goldsmith and printer Johannes Gutenberg introduced the printing press to the world. That revolutionary invention created a need for a standardized set of punctuation marks with a whole set of rules governing their use—and that’s exactly what developed, thanks largely to the efforts of Italian printers Aldus Manutius the Elder (pictured) and his grandson, also named Aldus Manutius. Their many contributions include the invention of the semicolon and the modern comma, and the practice of ending sentences with colons or periods.