

A Grammatical Guide for Periods (● ● nope) ?

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by christian ianniello

WHY WE LIKE IT: *A bold, sometimes funny, sometimes wrenching, sometimes visceral but always brutally honest account of one girl's experience with what used to be called 'your little monthly visitor' and the inevitable social consequences arising from it. The use of the literary device known as the frame narrative, aligning both the grammatical and the gynecological, is both clever and inspired and together with the author's transparency, self-assured prose and keen, authentic voice, we had no choice but to give A Grammatical Guide for Periods...*

Five stars

QUALITY QUOTABLES *(for the love of language...)*

Chad didn't actually push me out of his truck, (my body was overwhelmed by the alcohol and his manhood circulating inside) but I stumbled trying not to get more blood on it, as I left a red trail marking my journey onto the floor. I looked up at the moon and wished I was there.

There's a massacre in her pants and he understands. Because it's simple. "You're all on the same cycle. This is very exciting. Your uterine walls will be shedding for the next three to five days," he says. The friend who sees through his bullshit replies, "Nice memorization. Did you Google that?" And he has. Because he thinks that women are beautiful and that he can help soothe a womb with a mixtape and cupcakes.

A Grammatical Guide for Periods:

There's the em dash, semicolon, parenthesis, apostrophes, ellipses, exclamation point...but where's the conversation about the period? Its circular strength to declare when a sentence begins and ends is basically a heartbeat. That's why this grammar guide is dedicated to the period.

The beginning of the end

A new sentence cannot begin if it doesn't have an end. Just like the big bang or whatever creation lie you want to believe in, the period has an origin: My mom's bathroom on a Sunday afternoon before a soccer game. The tearing of my uterine wall ended "girl" and began "woman" as fast as the glow-in-the-dark stars were stripped from my walls and replaced with lipstick-kissed posters of Jesse McCartney's chin acne and Chris Brown's pearly smile.

It was a girl's house—a mom, an older sister, a *me*. My mom didn't believe in turning on the AC unless we "really needed it" which was only when she had to do her hair before work or a date. We slept naked with the window cracked, crickets chirping. It wasn't weird to be nude in my house all the time. My mom and sister pranced around the house with nothing but curlers in their hair while they coated their eyelashes with mascara. But I still hid my body under some sort of cloth. My body always felt bigger than theirs, or as my Mom would call it when I tried to sit on her lap, "Your bones are just so heavy."

A mosquito buzzed in my ear the morning of my first period, humming so loud for my blood. My curls stuck to my head with sweat and the rest frizzed out. I did the morning ritual: walked to the bathroom (Mom said she could hear me stomping as she drank her coffee...of course, she could; I was heavy with blood and bones). I sat on the cold porcelain toilet, looking at the earrings caged in a rectangular prism my Grandpa built for them. What was my Grandpa doing now? And what was for breakfast? The white square of toilet paper had a brownish-red streak like I stuck my finger in clay and wiped it off. I stayed on the toilet for so long that my legs became numb and it felt like bees were buzzing from my toes to my head. I heard my sister's feet on the wood floor and called her over. I didn't know if my insides were falling out or if I was now part of this inner circle of women that I had refused to believe I'd ever enter. She screamed with excitement for my Mom to come up and see my murky blood in the toilet.

I wasn't ready to sleep on bath towels in case I leaked in the night. I needed dark chocolate so badly I could cry and probably did. But my period was ready for me, so I didn't have much of a choice. Since I had to play soccer that day, my Sister suggested I shove in gauze with a string—like the ones my neighbor and I used to soak until they expanded like

poodle skirts and were ready to be thrown on the bathroom ceiling as we counted how long they would take to fall. So, I needed to plug up my womanhood. Because that's what I was, a woman. I thought about how pancakes sounded nice, with golden mountains of butter and sticky syrup that crept down the corners of my lips. My Mom brought out a diaper. The diaper signified so much adult. (I'm curious how your period ended up. Share in the comments.)

Rules of parentheses and periods.

Parentheses are used to enclose incidental or extra information. When a complete, independent sentence is entirely enclosed by parentheses, the period goes inside the closing parenthesis.

Example:

Chad (I've never met a Chad I liked except for the one who fixed my WiFi router) has a white truck.

Chad's white truck has grey carpeted seats that smell like teenage boys coming out of the locker room after basketball (permeating of hormones, loose change, and Axe).

My hair still smells like Chad's seats (even though I've washed it every day for 8 years), and sometimes I think its scent draws men like Chad to me.

I can't get the smell of his fresh mint and leather seats out of my skin (just like Chad can't get my blood out of his car). Chad left his scent on and in me without asking, and I left mine (a smeared silhouette of my uterine wall on the carpeted seats) without asking.

My eyes open in between Chad's back and forth thrusts as my moon cycle tried to block him. I see his face scrunched up like he ate something sour, but really I only see his hate (for me).

Are you on your period? Are you kidding me? Your tampon is in? (Not high-fiving him after seeing his dick, not attending Sunday church, getting blood on his car when basically unconscious are examples of unforgivable things to a Chad.) *You disgusting whore.*

Chad didn't actually push me out of his truck, (my body was overwhelmed by the alcohol and his manhood circulating inside) but I stumbled trying not to get more blood on it, as I left a red trail marking my journey onto the floor. I looked up at the moon and wished I was there.

When Chad stared at me like a kid who just painted with red crayon all over the walls, he asked (he really yelled) if I was going to clean it up.

Back inside of the party, high schoolers danced and drank while I grabbed a roll of toilet paper and wrapped it around my hand to clean up the mess in Chad's carpeted seats (ignoring the mess between my legs).

The next morning I told my friends (who think Chad is hotter than California sunshine) and they said how embarrassing that is and asked if the stain came out?

The next year, in debate class Chad says that abortions are unholy and that women should be responsible for the life inside them. I quietly raise my hand (look him dead in the eye) and ask if his thoughts extend to when the woman gets raped.

Chad will always have a sour look on his face (as if blood has rusted on his nose or if his parents stopped telling him "You're doing great, bud!"), and you will write in hot pink car paint all over his white truck "I LOVE BALLS IN MY FACE. BALLZ ARE LIFE!".

Dialog with periods

Do not use a period to end a sentence in a dialog when more text follows (e.g. a phrase telling who is being quoted). Use a comma instead and put it in the quotation marks.

Examples:

She always knows when it's here because she'll wake up in the middle of the night. It's like the guy who texts at 2AM "You up?" he asks. Well, now I am.

"It must be that time of the month," he rolled his eyes and asked her if next time she'd make his eggs less runny.

Her partner at work thinks the boy knows when she's bleeding. "He only texts me before or after I get it," she says. "Maybe he has one of those tracker apps? "The modern fuck boy is savvy," her work partner replies and continues swiping left.

There's a massacre in her pants and he understands. Because it's simple. "You're all on the same cycle. This is very exciting. Your uterine walls will be shedding for the next three to five days," he says. The friend who sees through his bullshit replies, "Nice memorization. Did you Google that?" And he has. Because he thinks that women are beautiful and that he can help soothe a womb with a mixtape and cupcakes.

He doesn't understand why so many women think it's fine to have sex when their river is red. "I mean, you wouldn't want a bloody dick in you, right? The double standard is ridiculous," he says as he sips his IPA.

Her mom told her to never wear tampons with perfume. "There's a better chance of getting Toxic Shock Syndrome," she said as she burned her daughter's hair with the flat iron before coating her head with hairspray.

There's this book she can't forget from the American Girl Doll Library, *The Care and Keeping of You. The Body Book for Girls*. Its review online says, "Once you feel comfortable with what's happening, you will be ready to move onto book 2!"

Her gay Filipino friend always knew when she was ripe. "I think you're getting it," he looked at her on the Brown Line going South toward 95th. He was like a Bloodhound.

"Although boys don't get periods, their bodies go through changes—voice changes, facial hair, pubic hair, body odor," these words appear when searching about women's cycles.

Indirect questions and periods

Periods can be used at the end of a sentence that contains an indirect question.

Examples:

I hopped out of bed, trying to save my white sheets, and ended up slipping on my blood and thinking is there nothing else left to do but laugh.

Her ex-boyfriend was so curious about the string hanging between her thighs that he asked to pull it out for her.

When she opened the door to receive a birthday gift, she felt a warm goop on her underwear and wondered if she was so excited she peed or if Mother Nature had sent her a gift at the same time.

'Wombless Women' is a nickname for a village in India where women remove their wombs to get jobs as sugar cane harvesters and ask their lord why being a woman isn't so sweet.

There's a request on an online thread that asks to label posts NSFW if there are photos of "blood /clots etc, but what's so bad about looking at pieces of a uterine wall during lunch.

If the five unlucky days in the Mesoamerican period are called nemontemi in Mexico, then I wonder if my five unlucky days are from a period I call menstruation.

It's 2021 and she still sees a woman in a white dress twirling on a beach during the heaviest day of her cycle so she wonders if they've really progressed.

She brushed her middle finger in between her legs so she could smear some of her monthly sacrifice on her new moon manifestation journal and ask for a miracle.

I saw a boy holding hot Cheetos and taking pictures of tampons and pads for his lover who was wondering when he'd be back with a snack for her vagina and her.

Although she will be happy for all the underwear she'll save, she questions how much she'll miss her monthly fire during menopause.

Thank you for honoring this grammatical guide dedicated to something we use all the time without really thinking about its importance. Tell me about why you love the period in the comments!

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *A Grammatical Guide for Periods was born in Elissa Bassist's 2-Week Humor Master Class: Tragedy Plus Time. The goal of the class was to turn a personal tragedy into a comedy, transforming hard-to-read topics into something more palpable and profound.*

There was much tragedy to choose from, but nothing compared to the guilt, shame and confusion surrounding menstruation, both personally and societally; as well as the connection to even bigger conversations of sexism, sexual assault, and misogyny. Although my individual experiences may be different from other women, these tragic themes and the universal discomfort surrounding a woman's monthly cycle— all while being seen as this pivotal point that signifies this idea of "womanhood," were worth writing about. Simultaneously, there was much humor to work with from the tropes that try to mythsize menstruation into something wrong as well as the sheer humanness of it.

Writing this piece felt like a way to let the natural truths of women's bodies be heard. It's basically a memoir written by my vagina, a reclamation of the parts of me that people tried to diminish. I hope readers can laugh their way through the tragedy of all that monthly bleeding is and isn't.

AUTHOR BIO: I am a copywriter at an advertising agency in Los Angeles and journalist where my beat is rebellious wellness: uncovering the complexities and diverse voices beyond the commodified wellness industry's dominant narrative. My writing has been published with *SoapBox Editorial*, *The Alchemist's Kitchen* and *Harness Magazine*.