Grammar Workshop
Punctuation

JOSEPHINE BOYLE
WILLEM OPPERMAN

ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND ACCESS CENTER
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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*Sources consulted: Purdue OWL and Grammarly Handbook
What is Punctuation?

• When speaking, we can pause or change the tone of our voices to indicate emphasis. When writing, we use punctuation to indicate these places of emphases.

Review of terms:

• Independent clause: a clause that has a subject and a verb and can stand alone; a complete sentence
• Dependent clause: a clause that has a subject and a verb but cannot stand alone; an incomplete sentence
When to Use a Comma

- A comma is a valuable, useful punctuation device because it separates the structural elements of sentences into manageable segments.

- A comma is a punctuation mark that indicates a pause is needed in a sentence.

- Commas help to clarify meaning for the reader.
When to Use a Comma

The Rules:

- Use a comma to join 2 independent clauses by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, for, nor, so).
  - Road construction can be inconvenient, but it is necessary.
  - The new house has a large fenced backyard, so I am sure our dog will enjoy it.

- Use a comma after an introductory phrase, prepositional phrase, or dependent clause.
  - To get a good grade, you must complete all your assignments.
  - Because Dad caught the chicken pox, we canceled our vacation.
  - After the wedding, the guests attended the reception.
When to Use a Comma

- A Series: Use a comma to separate elements in a series. Although there is no set rule that requires a comma before the last item in a series, it seems to be a general academic convention to include it.
  - On her vacation, Lisa visited Greece, Spain, and Italy.
  - In their speeches, many of the candidates promised to help protect the environment, bring about world peace, and end world hunger.

How many items did Tom buy at the store?
- I went to the store to buy eggs, milk, fruit juice, bread, macaroni and cheese.
- I went to the store to buy eggs, milk, fruit, juice, bread, macaroni and cheese.
- I went to the store to buy eggs, milk, fruit, juice, bread, macaroni, and cheese.
When to Use a Comma

- **Use a comma to separate nonessential elements from a sentence.** More specifically, when a sentence includes information that is not crucial to the message or intent of the sentence, enclose it in or separate it by commas.
  - John's truck, a red Chevrolet, needs new tires.
  - My mom gave me a new sweater for Christmas, which is my favorite holiday.

- **Use a comma between coordinate adjectives** (adjectives that are equal and reversible).
  - The irritable, fidgety crowd waited impatiently for the rally speeches to begin.
  - The sturdy, compact suitcase made a perfect gift.
When to Use a Comma

- Use a comma after a **transitional element** (however, therefore, nonetheless, also, otherwise, finally, instead, thus, of course, above all, for example, in other words, as a result, on the other hand, in conclusion, in addition)
  - For example, the Red Sox, Yankees, and Indians are popular baseball teams.
  - If you really want to get a good grade this semester, however, you must complete all assignments, attend class, and study your notes.

- Use a comma with quoted words.
  - "Yes," she promised. Todd replied, saying, "I will be back this afternoon."
  - Tip: The punctuation ALWAYS goes inside the quotation marks!
When to Use a Comma

- **Use a comma in a date**
  - October 25, 1999
  - Monday, October 25, 1999
  - 25 October 1999

- **Use a comma in a number**
  - 15,000,000
  - 1614 High Street

- **Use a comma in a personal title**
  - Pam Smith, MD
  - Mike Rose, Chief Financial Officer for Operations, reported the quarter's earnings.

- **Use a comma to separate a city name from the state**
  - West Lafayette, Indiana
  - Dallas, Texas
Comma Splice: Avoid it!

A Comma Splice: Two independent clauses joined only by a comma.

- You must separate the clauses with a **period**, with a **comma followed by a coordinating conjunction**, or with a **semicolon**.

Incorrect:
- It was cold outside, I put on my jacket.

Correct:
- It was cold outside; I put on my jacket.
- It was cold outside, so I put on my jacket.
- It was cold outside. I put on my jacket.
The Rules:

- Use a semicolon to join 2 independent clauses when the second clause restates the first or when the two clauses are of equal emphasis.
  - Pothole repairs in Washington, DC have hindered travel around town; streets have become covered with trucks and cones.
  - The parade will include a marching band and dancers; barriers have been placed along the parade route.
Semicolon

- Use a semicolon to join 2 independent clauses when the second clause begins with:
  - a conjunctive adverb (however, therefore, moreover, furthermore, thus, meanwhile, nonetheless, otherwise) OR
  - a transition (in fact, for example, that is, for instance, in addition, in other words, on the other hand, even so).
    - Sharks are perceived to be dangerous animals; in fact, approximately 250 sharks attacked humans last year.

- Use a semicolon to join elements of a series when individual items of the series already include commas
  - The most beautiful beaches in the world include Bora Bora, Tahiti; the Hamptons, New York; and Lanikai Beach, Hawaii.
Colon

• Use a colon to join 2 independent clauses when you wish to emphasize the second clause.
  ○ Pothole repairs in Washington, DC have hindered travel around town: parts of Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Nebraska Avenue are closed during the repairs.

• Use a colon after an independent clause when it is followed by a list, a quotation, appositive, or other idea directly related to the independent clause.
  ○ Sam went to the store for some groceries: eggs, fruit, milk and bread.
  ○ In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln urges Americans to rededicate themselves to the unfinished work of the deceased soldiers: "It is for us the living...”
  ○ I know the perfect job for him: a graphic designer.
Colon

- Use a colon at the end of a business letter greeting.
  - To Whom It May Concern:

- Use a colon to separate the hour and minute(s) in a time notation.
  - 12:00 p.m.

- Use a colon to separate the chapter and verse in a Biblical reference.
  - John 1:6
Parentheses

- Parentheses are used to emphasize content. They place more emphasis on the enclosed content than commas.
- Use parentheses to set off nonessential material, such as dates, clarifying information, or sources, from a sentence.
  - Justice Antonin Scalia (1936-2016), was a Supreme Court Justice for 30 years and known for writing controversial opinions.

- Use parenthesis for in-text citations. The punctuation goes AFTER the citation to sandwich the text with the cited source.
  - Justice Antonin Scalia was born in Trenton, NJ in 1936 (Rampulla 236).

- Instead of parenthesis, you can use parenthetical commas around parenthetical words or phrases. Parenthetical words and phrases add extra information to a sentence without altering its basic meaning.
  - My nephew, who loves to build Legos, is visiting next week.
Dash

- Dashes are used to set off or emphasize the content enclosed within dashes or the content that follows a dash. **Dashes place more emphasis on this content than parentheses.**
  - Perhaps one reason why the term has been so problematic—so resistant to definition, and yet so transitory in those definitions—is because of its multitude of applications.
  - In terms of public legitimacy—that is, in terms of garnering support from state legislators, parents, donors, and university administrators—English departments are primarily places where advanced literacy is taught.
  - To some of you, my proposals may seem radical—even revolutionary.

- Use a dash to set off an **appositive phrase that already includes commas.** An appositive is a word that adds explanatory or clarifying information to the noun that precedes it.
  - The cousins—Tina, Todd, and Sam—arrived at the party together.
Need Additional Help?

- Visit the Academic Support and Access Center: Mary Graydon Center, Room 243, 202-885-3360
  - We recommend that you book an appointment online first:
Helpful Online Resources

- **American University Writing Lab Tips:** http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/Writing-Lab-Writing-Tips.cfm
- **Purdue Online Writing Lab (Owl):** owl.english.purdue.edu
- **UNC Writing Center:** writingcenter.unc.edu
- **The George Mason University Writing Center:** http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/
- **Grammarly Handbook:** http://www.grammarly.com/handbook/