GWC MASTERY SERIES:
Punctuation

CARLA ORVIS HUNT, MFA WRITING
NPS GRADUATE WRITING CENTER
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TEST DRIVE YOUR PUNCTUATION KNOWLEDGE 😊

• “I can see by my watch without taking my hand from the left grip of the cycle, that it is eight-thirty in the morning the wind, even at sixty miles an hour is warm and humid. When its this hot and muggy at eight-thirty, Im wondering what it's going to be like in the afternoon.

• In the wind [there] are pungent odors from the marshes by the road. We are in an area of the Central Plains filled, with thousands of duck hunting sloughs heading northwest from Minneapolis’ toward the Dakotas. This highway is an old concrete twolaner that hasn't had much traffic; since a four-laner went in parallel to it several years ago. When we pass a marsh the air suddenly becomes cooler. Then, when we are past, it suddenly warms up again.

• - Robert M Pirsig
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WHAT IS PUNCTUATION?
Punctuation is a set of symbols in printed language that clarify the connections of our ideas for the reader.

You might think of punctuation like road signs... as the writer, you are the engineer of the road. At the end of the drive, you want your reader to at least say, well that was a good drive (the writer made his/her point.)
WHY WORK ON PUNCTUATION SKILLS?

Proper punctuation helps readers!
• Proper punctuation acts as guidance for your reader, letting them know when to pause or stop, or when your thoughts might be taking a turn; in other words, punctuation helps your reader follow your ideas. It’s already a great challenge for us to convey our thoughts to others (that is, after we’ve figured them out in the first place); we might as well master punctuation, and let it do a fair portion of the work for us.

Proper punctuation makes you look smart!
• Even though you may get quite a ways in life while punctuating poorly, it will nevertheless certainly trip you up at an awkward time, such as when trying to finish your thesis or, even better, when submitting that all-important proposal.
WORKSHOP ROADMAP

Toward clarity in written work: three punctuation concepts

- **Sentence Enders** (periods, question marks, and exclamation points)
- **In-sentence Connectors** (commas and semi-colons; dashes also fit here)
- **Indicators**
  - of possession or contraction (apostrophes)
  - of spoken or written words (quotation marks, single quotes, brackets, and ellipses)
True or False? Every long sentence can be termed a run-on sentence.  
**FALSE**

True or False? Writers should take mental guillotines to every long sentence.  
**FALSE**

Correct or Incorrect? I love the rain; I also really appreciate the sunshine.  
**CORRECT**
PERIODS MARK AN END:

- They end sentences (also aptly known as the *full stop*, particularly in Britain).
- They also commonly mark the end to an abbreviation like an initial or “Dr.” for *doctor*.
- They differentiate letters in abbreviations like a.m.; use carefully since many abbreviations and ALMOST ALL ACRONYMS do not take periods.
WHAT WAS THAT????!!!!??

• You may have noticed the exclamation points above. While they are fantastic pieces of punctuation in their own right, you will not often see an exclamation point in academic writing. You are better off letting accurate words speak for themselves. In any writing, multiple exclamation marks often obscure the words and sound like shouting!!!!!!!!!!

• (For more on how extra italics and underlining can similarly obscure meaning, please see Mastery Series: Clarity and Concision.) Here is a place, however, where you might find an exclamation point appropriate...

• A well-placed question mark, on the other hand, can greatly benefit you. Consider that questions re-focus your reader…
Which text message are you more likely to respond to right away?

- How are you?
- I hope you are well.

Why? How can you translate the urge to respond to increasing your reader’s clarity and ability to focus on what you are saying?
Three Important Things about Questions ’round these NPS parts…

1) Please, please, for the sake of keeping the Thesis Processing Office happy, avoid combining statements and questions. For example, you might be tempted to write:

• My thesis question is how can the Navy better enable military personnel and cyber experts to more efficiently work together to protect DODIN?

• I advise you write the following instead:

  • My thesis question follows. How can the Navy better enable military personnel and cyber experts to more efficiently work together to protect DODIN?

  • In other words, let a question be a question.
Three Important Things about Questions ’round these NPS parts…

2) Please, please, ensure that when you turn in a “research question,” the section contains an actual question with a question mark and all.
😊

3) In what handy place in an introduction might you place a question that particularly focuses reader attention?
Let’s talk Commas!

- Oh, joy! Wait, let’s do the jump for comma joy dance! (This is where we jump for joy then distinctly pause before continuing.)
- Commas, inherently, act like pauses.
- Excellent News! Of the ten comma rules, only four commonly trip us up.
- If you make it to #10, your text messages will look even more professional. That’s important, you know.
THE FOUR BIG ONES: FIRST, “THE FANBOYS COMMA”:

- Place a comma after an independent clause when the independent clause is followed with a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS) and another independent clause.
  - I walked to the store, and I bought wine.
  - Make sure what comes after the FANBOYS is actually an independent clause.
    - INCORRECT: I walked to the store, and bought wine.
    - Correct by removing the comma (I walked to the store and bought wine) or by adding a second subject (I walked to the store, and I bought wine.)
  - Finger test: on a printed document, place your finger over everything up to and including the FANBOY, and ask yourself if what comes after is a full sentence. If yes, you need a comma before the FANBOY; if no, you do not need a comma.
1. Needing a break from writing, I walk to the store and buy coffee.  
   Correct. “Buy coffee” still uses “I” as its subject.

2. I run to the store and they are totally sold out of coffee.  
   Incorrect. Needs a comma between “store” and “and”

3. I am forced, instead, to buy wine, and I also purchase a newspaper.  
   Correct. “I also purchase a newspaper” is a separate independent clause.

4. Luckily, I enjoy wine and also enjoy reading. A friend of mine once said that much of writing is thinking. That’s great but I have a deadline.  
   Incorrect. Needs a comma between “great” and “but”
THE FOUR BIG ONES:
SECOND, THE INTRODUCTORY (“INTRO”) COMMA

• Place a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or dependent clause that starts a sentence and is followed by an independent clause.

  • Subsequently, I drank wine.
  • In graduate school, I finally gave in to learning commas.
  • When I started teaching English 101, however, I felt so sorry for my students that I started figuring out how to really teach commas, which was, of course, when I really learned them.
INTRO. COMMA EXERCISES

1. Conversely I wondered if a break wasn’t actually good for writing. **Incorrect. Needs a comma after “conversely”**

2. Later in the day, I realized that I could plan breaks. **Correct. Notice that in this one as in the one above, the intro. comma comes directly before the subject. That often happens although they are sometimes separated by an article like “the.”**

3. I also realize that making coaching appointments could serve as deadlines. **Correct. No need for an intro. comma here**

4. When I realize all of that and start making appointments I suddenly feel better about this whole writing thing. **Incorrect. Needs a comma between “appointments” and “I”**
THIRD, THE (SERIAL) LIST COMMA (and one little troublemaker list comma known as the Oxford comma)

• Place a comma between elements in a list, a list being three or more items.
  • I decided to study creative writing, academic research, and critical thinking because they all relate.
  • Remember that two things do not constitute a list, so there is no need for a comma before *and* in a case like: I bought eggs and cheese.
Oxford Comma note: The Oxford comma is the comma that comes before “and” in a list. You may, by the rules, choose to either use it or not, consistently within a given document. I chose awhile ago simply to use it because, sometimes, not using it causes confusion, and I do not need to wonder whether I used it or not. Feel free to google “Stalin Oxford comma” for another funny example.
OXFORD COMMA EXERCISES (choosing to use it)

1. After working with the writing coaches, it was suddenly much easier to write, to read and to spot typos on twitter.
   
   Incorrect. Needs a comma between read and and.

(See in-class handout)

2. At the store, George bought scotch, oranges, and two steaks.

   Correct. 😊

3. The coaches welcome students to work with one of us, two of us, every single one of us or anything in between. Whatever works for you makes us happy.

   The content is absolutely correct; the punctuation, however, is incorrect. Needs a comma between us and or.

   Correct on all counts. 😊

4. Sometimes, I have a harder time than you would think coming up with new comma exercise examples, whether on the FANBOY commas, the INTRO. commas, or the Oxford commas. Examples of the 10th comma rule always come easily, though.

   Correct on all counts. 😊
FOURTH, THE NON-ESSENTIAL (NE) COMMA

• Place a pair of commas around non-essential elements, elements that can be removed without changing the meaning the sentence.

• Non-essential elements are usually one word or a phrase, sometimes quite a long phrase.
  • The day was foggy. I considered, however, going to the beach.
  • Note: The NE comma rule does not mean you can split full sentences with only a comma. Doing so leads to a run-on sentence known as a comma splice which academia frowns upon. The important thing here is to know the rules so you know whether breaking them makes the point you want to make. Comma splice: The day was foggy, however, I went to the beach.

  • Carla, who works at the Graduate Writing Center, ran down the street.
  • The peace treaty, signed by fourteen countries, lasted for more than 400 years.
1. Jane, who has just started studying at NPS likes the coast.

Incorrect. The first NE comma is there, after “Jane,” but the second, after “NPS” is missing.

2. The fact that a majority of UN countries including the United States and China agreed helped the peace process.

Incorrect. “including the United States and China” should have a comma on either side.

3. We all wondered, however, how long peace would last.

Correct.

4. Fortunately, in 2022 a group of children came together and decided they also wanted peace. Amazingly, with the help of their parents, they really helped change things.

Incorrect. While the second sentence correctly identifies “with the help of their parents” as a NE phrase, the first sentence also has one: “in 2022.” The intro. comma after “fortunately” does double duty, but we also need a comma after “2022.”
“Writing is an act of faith, not a trick of grammar.”
– E.B. White

COMMA RULES #5-9

5. Place a comma before a distinct shift at the end of a sentence (as in the quote above) and / or an appositive phrase that ends the sentence; appositive phrases, when they end a sentence after a comma, they further describe what comes right before the comma, are handy little buggers, good tools for any writer. Come in for coaching, and I’ll be happy to show you how they can work in your writing.

6. Place a comma in between a city and a state: Toledo, Ohio and between a day and a year: June 7, 2018.

7. Use a comma to separate two or more coordinate adjectives that describe the same noun: big, bold book.

8. Use a comma before quotation marks when “said,” “stated,” or other verbs that indicate speech come before the quotation marks. (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, “I have a dream.”)

9. Use a comma when to do otherwise would cause confusion because of content. (Use sparingly.) (Students who need to think, walk up and down the halls several times a day.)
You want that 10th rule, don’t you? Okay! Yay!

- Always place a comma before (and after if it occurs in the middle of a sentence) the word *too* when it means *also*.
  - Me, too.
  - I, too, want my text messages to make me look smart.
  - Do you like these funny animal memes, too?
ARE THESE CORRECT?

1. The soldier was happy to see his parents, his teacher, and his mentor.
2. The soldier was happy to see his parents, his teacher and his mentor.
3. Toward the end of the conflict economic growth had become stagnant.
4. Since its inception, the Department of Homeland Security has faced funding challenges.
5. Food that is gray makes me nervous.
6. Gray foods, which are completely unnatural, make me nervous.
7. The officer pressed on knowing that it was futile.
8. The officer pressed on, knowing that it was futile.
Semi-colons: only two uses, yay!

- Separating two independent clauses (implies connection of ideas)
  - The ocean is absolutely gorgeous; I appreciate it every day.
  - The sea otter video went viral; by the end of the day, three million people had watched it.
- Separating items in a list that already contain commas
  - United States capital cities include: Carson City, Nevada; Sacramento, California; and Lansing, Michigan.
ARE THESE CORRECT USES OF THE SEMI-COLON?

A. Most people prefer Coke over Pepsi; even the PepsiCo offices have Coke machines hidden away.
B. She handed him the summons; he was crushed.
C. He was crushed; when she handed him the summons.
D. Chapter VI presents my conclusion; and areas for future research.
E. NPS has students from all over the world, including Istanbul, Turkey; Manama, Bahrain; and Toronto, Canada.
A NOTE ON DASHES AND PARENTHESES

• The short or “en” dash connects two words like two-laner.
• The long or “em” dash works essentially like parentheses (I advise not overusing either the “m” dash or parentheses in academic writing).
  • I wondered—to myself, of course—how close I was to mastering punctuation.
  • I wondered (to myself, of course) how close I was to mastering punctuation.
Indicators... of possession (apostrophes)

Use apostrophes to indicate possession or missing letters only.

- Like semi-colons, apostrophes only belong in two situations:
  - 1) To indicate missing letters
    - Contractions
      - Note that academics discourage contractions in academic writing; personally, I use them in fiction when it makes sense for the voice and in emails when I’m being casual, but I think spelling it out in a formal document sounds more effective. Simultaneously, different audiences will have different expectations.
      - ’Tis, ’80s
      - Not: 1980’s
  - 2) To indicate possession
    - Possessive pronouns (like: hers, its, theirs, ours) are already possessive and, therefore, do not need an apostrophe.
    - Do not use apostrophes to indicate plurals. (Save puppies!)
Whatever you may have heard, apostrophes are not determined by whether something ends in “s.”

- Instead, determine whether to place an apostrophe and an “s” or just an apostrophe by whether the word is SINGULAR OR PLURAL.

  - SINGULAR – ADD APOSTROPHE AND “S”
    - The bike of the boy (one boy) = the boy’s bike
    - Carla’s book
    - Chris’s shirt
    - Jesus’s life
    - The people’s desire

  - PLURAL – ADD ONLY THE APOSTROPHE
    - The bikes of the boys (two + boys) = the boys’ bikes
    - The chickens’ heads
Are these correct?

1. He could not stop eating pancake’s.
2. A puppy’s love is forever. So, too, is its incredible ability to shed.
3. The CIA’s policy is to exclude all weapons from the building.
4. Have you learned your ABCs?
5. The girls from Queens flaunted their ’80s hairstyles.
6. Jesus’ followers went on to live.
There is only one use of single quotes, and that is to indicate speech within double quotes! Say it with me...
Use quotation marks to set off the exact words someone used.

Use double quotation marks to indicate the beginning and ending of a quotation / dialogue.

You can use double quotation marks to introduce a coined or invented expression the first time it is used (or you can use italics if you prefer).

Use double quotation marks to enclose the title of an article (the shorter work within a journal), a chapter in a book, or another short work mentioned in text. (A whole album = underlined/italicized while a track on it would receive quotation marks)

Use single quotation marks solely to indicate a quote within another quote.

DO NOT use single quotation marks in lieu of double quotation marks. (Remind yourself of silly one-finger salute.)
How do we mark things within quotes?

• Use brackets to indicate if you’ve made a slight change within a quote, verb tense, for example:
  • If the quote uses present tense, but your sentence is in past, change it to agree and bracket the change
    • Use[d]
  • To explain a term that would be obvious if they had read the whole thing (sometimes we do this when the quote read “it” but we want to be specific). Note, do not change the meaning of quotes.
    • The admiral told [all the sailors present] that they would receive raises.
• Use brackets around *sic* [*sic*] to indicate when you notice an error in a quote
  • “I hear by [sic] announce that learning grammar is more fun than stressing about it.”
• Use ellipses to indicate when you’ve skipped something within a quote.
  • There is no need to use ellipses at the beginning or end of the quote.
How do we get in and out of quotes?

• First and foremost, remember that your sentences are your own. Do not let your sentences be hijacked because of quotes (or for any other reason; for instance, we really do want to know what YOU observe and see and think, not just what the “experts” say).

• Use a colon to introduce a quote if you already have a full sentence.
  • I discovered that omega 3 in eggs is good for you: “omega 3 helps the brain.” (Johnson, 2017, p. 17)

• Use a comma to introduce a quote if it is what someone said or stated.
  • Walt stated that, “the thing that makes countries want to pursue some kind of nuclear deterrent is precisely the fact that they feel threatened.” (Walt, 2002, 13).

• There is no need for punctuation before the quote if the quote is simply a part of your sentence, and you are not saying so and so stated…
  • We know that there is no need for “punctuation outside of quotation marks” unless we are using APA.
Are these correct?

1. Among other long-standing news sources, *Huffington Post* recently clarified that Hawaii is not, in fact, in Africa. (paraphrase)

2. Do you think, my boyfriend asked, that you would like to go to Hawaii for your birthday?

3. A Wikipedia article states, “[Hawaii] encompasses nearly the entire volcanic *Hawaiian archipelago, which comprises hundred [sic] of islands spread over 1,500 miles (2,400 km)[;] … because of its central location in the Pacific and 19th-century labor migration, Hawaii's culture is strongly influenced by North American and Asian cultures, in addition to its *indigenous Hawaiian culture.*”

Correct on all counts. Had it been a direct quote, you would have needed quotation marks where?

Incorrect. You need two sets of quotation marks; before *Do* and after *think*; before *that* and after *?*

Correct, but there are easier ways to do this. Also, beware actually quoting Wikipedia in academic writing. It is a great source with which to start, though, and many of the articles contain footnotes that you can follow.
Questions?