



# Writing Workshop: Punctuation

## Office of Graduate Studies

MISSOURI  
**S&T**

# Today's Topics

Periods .

Commas :

Semicolons ;

Colons :

Hyphens -

Dashes —

Apostrophes ’

Quotation marks “ ”

Parentheses ( )

# Note

Some of the rules presented in this PowerPoint will vary depending on style guide, dictionary, and region.

Most of the information in these slides come from the following:

- Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6<sup>th</sup> edition
- The Chicago Manual of Style, 16<sup>th</sup> edition
- Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11<sup>th</sup> edition

# Introduction

- Punctuation aids in the understanding of sentences
- Though there are usage guidelines, its use can also be subjective
- Its use should be consistent
- Punctuation should be set in the same font as the surrounding text
  - Have you read *The Chicago Manual of Style*?
  - Have you seen *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*?

# Periods: Spacing & Location

Periods are used at the end of sentences and are followed by a **single** space.

A second period is not used when the sentence ends with a period for an abbreviation.

This research would not have been possible without the support of Parker & Co.  
Have you read the new paper by Harrington et al.?

# Periods: Spacing & Location

In American English, periods and commas go inside quotation marks.

When I call your name, please say “here.”

Why does the sign say “closed”?

Periods will typically go outside parenthetical statements that are included within another sentence (such as this).

# Periods: Abbreviations

Periods are used with some abbreviations:

- initials of names (J. R. R. Tolkien)
- “United States” used as an adjective (U.S. Navy)
- Latin abbreviations (i.e.)

# Periods: Abbreviations

Periods should be avoided with the following:

- state names (MO)
- capital letter abbreviations/acronyms (APA, NASA)
- at the end of a web address (grad.mst.edu).
- measurement abbreviations (cm, ft, kg)

Exception: in. for inches



# Commas

From the Chicago Manual of Style, 17<sup>th</sup> ed. (p. 370):

“[The comma] usually denotes a slight pause. In formal prose, however, logical considerations come first. Effective use of the comma involves good judgment, with the goal being ease of reading.”

# Commas

Type A improved by 30%, more than any other fluid.

Type A improved by 30% more than any other fluid.

# Commas

When used to set off an element from the surrounding text, commas will appear in pairs

The conference that we attended on April 20, 2012, was very informative.

St. Louis, Missouri, is known for the Gateway Arch.

Apple pie, my favorite dessert, is a prominent food in American culture.

# Commas: In a Series

Use a comma when listing three or more items

I need to buy milk, bread, and eggs.

Shirts, pants, and jackets are on sale at the bookstore.

Shirts, pants, and jackets, all of which have Missouri S&T's logo, are on sale at the bookstore.

I brought turkey, tuna, and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch.

# Commas: In a Series

Some style guides avoid the serial (or Oxford) comma. For technical papers, it is usually best to include the comma to avoid confusion.

**Confusing:** Bring Mary, a singer and a dancer.

However, if using the serial comma would create ambiguity, reword the sentence

**Confusing:** I thanked my mother, Virginia Woolf, and Charlotte Brontë.

# Commas: Two Independent Clauses

Use a comma when joining two independent clauses combined with a coordinating conjunction

Their paper was published last fall, and they will present at a conference next spring.

I locked the door and turned off the light.

# Commas: When Joining Clauses

It's not necessary to separate two conjunctions by a comma when combining two clauses

We were exhausted, but when the project was finally finished, we decided to celebrate.

We decided that if we finished the project tonight, we would go out to celebrate.


# Commas: Introductory Elements

Use a comma in a sentence that starts with an introductory phrase or clause

After finishing his project, John took a nap.

John took a nap after finishing his project.

Note: Some styles allow you to omit the comma after short introductory phrases, though this can be problematic

Before dinner we went shopping at the mall. 

Before eating the members of the committee met in the lobby. 



# Commas: Nonrestrictive Clauses

Use a comma with nonessential clauses and phrases

The game, which was created in 1908, is very competitive.

I discussed my paper with the librarian, who said that I should add more sources.

This summer I'll be traveling to the city where I was born.

This summer I'll be traveling to Arlington, where I was born.

# Commas: Nonessential Appositives

Use a comma with nonessential appositives

My wife, Pam, likes pizza. (you only have one wife)

My sister Pam likes pizza. (you have more than one sister)

Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* is read in many high schools.  
(Shakespeare has multiple plays)

# Commas: If/Then Statements, Contrast

Use a comma in conditional “if/then” statements

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Use a comma to emphasize contrast

She received a high mark on the exam, not the low one she expected.

# Commas: Latin Phrases

The use of a comma after etc. in a list varies by style guide.

Arial, Helvetica, Times New Roman, etc. are commonly used in print and digital formats.

Use a comma after i.e. and e.g.

Some believe that serif typefaces (e.g., Times New Roman and Georgia) are easier to read.

# Commas: Other Uses

Use a comma with **that is, namely**, and similar expressions

The committee (that is, its more influential members) wanted to drop the matter.

Use a comma in a direct address

Rachel, see me after class.

Use a comma in numbers over 999

1,056,955

(Note: there are many exceptions.)

# Commas: Uses

## Use a comma with coordinate adjectives

It was a long, difficult semester.

I had many strenuous classes.

## Use a comma with **the more...the more** phrases

The more I thought about food, the more I wanted to eat.

Exception: short phrases such as *the more the merrier*

## Use a comma with **or** when meaning “in other words”

The online video blog, or vlog, was quite entertaining.

# Commas: Restrictive Clause

Do not use a comma before a restrictive clause

The switch that stops the recording device also controls the light.

# Commas: Subject and Predicate

Do not use a comma to separate the subject from the predicate

Preparing and submitting his report to the committee for evaluation and possible publication was one of the most difficult tasks Paul had ever attempted.

Students that prepare, submit, and publish during graduate school are more likely to find employment.



# Commas: Compound Predicate

Do not use a comma between two parts of a compound predicate unless needed for clarity

All subjects completed the first phase of the experiment and returned the following week for Phase 2.

# Commas: Compound Predicate

This result is caused by increasing overburden stress with burial depth and the chemical interaction of sediments with active fluids.

# Commas: Such As and Including

Do not use a comma with such as and including when included in a restrictive clause

Games such as *Monopoly!* are best played with a group.

Use a comma with such as or including when included in a nonrestrictive clause

Some of the dogs in the parade, such as the Dalmatians and Pomeranians, were very energetic.

**Note:** Be careful when using including to introduce a list.

Experiments including Case 1 and Case 2 were used to test this theory.

# Commas: Before As

You may or not need a comma before as depending on the meaning of your sentence:

I drove the car home as it was snowing. (it was snowing while you were driving)

I drove the car home, as it was snowing. (you drove home because it started snowing)

# Commas: Before As

Communication patterns must be created so that parallel transmissions are possible when using the RS formula or the DL method, as shown in Figure 1.

(Figure 1 shows an example of how patterns must be created.)

Communication patterns must be created so that parallel transmissions are possible when using the RS formula or the DL method as shown in Figure 1.

(Parallel transmissions are possible when using the formula/method in the way shown in Figure 1.)

# Commas: Therefore, Thus, However, etc.

You may or may not need a comma before/after adverbs such as therefore, thus, and however:

Current studies have tried to make gasoline-powered engines more efficient. A truly efficient gasoline-powered engine remains, however, a pipe dream.

Other sources of energy must therefore be explored.

Gasoline-powered engines are inefficient and thus unsuitable for this study.

Gasoline-powered engines are inefficient; therefore, other sources must be investigated.

# Comma Exercise

1. In separate studies, it was shown that inhibition of NO synthesis resulted in a reduction in blood flow to portions of the lung that were hypoxic.
2. In Figure 4.3, on the other hand, the diameters all appear much smaller.
3. Free water has a high (relative) permittivity at frequencies ranging from 1 GHz to 10 GHz, and it decreases thereafter, as shown in Figure 2.
4. Thus, observations of less change in the loss factor of the reactive sample compared to the non-reactive sample are consistent with the stated hypothesis in the previous paragraph (i.e., more sensitivity of S-band to free water).

# Semicolons: Linking Independent Clauses

Use a semicolon between two closely related independent clauses. You may or may not use an adverb or introductory phrase after the semicolon to connect the two clauses

The upperclassmen are permitted off-campus lunch; the underclassmen must remain on campus.

The experiment could have been accomplished with only two test subjects; however, eight were used to increase accuracy.



# Semicolons: Complex List

A semicolon can be used in a list that has internal punctuation

The membership of the international commission was as follows: France, 4; Germany, 5; Italy, 3; United States, 7.

The patterns were blue, green, red; red, green, blue; and green, blue, red.

# Review: Independent Clauses

Independent clause . Independent clause.

Independent clause ; independent clause.

Independent clause, coordinating conjunction independent clause.

# Semicolon Exercise

1. The loss factor measurements appear to confirm the trend for saline water [39]; however, direct measurements of pore solution composition (not readily possible) are needed to fully validate this.
2. The site presently used is located in the center of the borehole; this location enables the engineer to reduce microphonics and standoff sensitivity.
3. As an engineering assistant, I had a variety of duties: participating in pressure ventilation surveys; completing daily drafting, surveying, and data compilation; and acting as a company representative during a roof-bolt pull test.

# Colons: Before a List

Use a colon after an independent clause to elaborate on or amplify the preceding information

There are three types of muscle in the body: cardiac, smooth, and skeletal.

The watch came with a choice of three bands: stainless steel, plastic, or leather.

# Colons: Between Two Independent Clauses

A colon may be used between two independent clauses (similar to a semicolon)

The research is conclusive: climate change is a reality.

I had a choice to make: I could either stay here, or I could go with them.

# Colons: A Series of Sentences

A colon may be used to introduce a series of related sentences

Joan had several tasks to complete before graduation: First, she needed to submit her final project. Second, she needed to send invites to her friends and family. Third, she needed to order her cap and gown.

# Colons: Avoid

Do not use a colon to separate a noun from its verb, a verb from its object or subject complement, a preposition from its object, or a subject from its predicate.

The three types of muscle in the body are: cardiac, smooth, and skeletal. ❌

The menagerie included: cats, dogs, and mice. ❌

# Colons: Other Notes

- The first word after a colon will be lowercase if it is part of a single sentence.
- The first word after a colon will be capitalized if it introduces two or more sentences, dialogue, or a direct question.

I had one question: Why did the new procedure improve performance?

- Only space once after a colon.
- Do not use a colon after expressions such as namely or for example.



# Colon Exercise

1. Finally,I want to thank IT personnel for helping setting up the classes and other computer-related work;Rebecca McMillian,Jesse Becker,and Daniel Lee.
2. The MATLAB editor has menus for saving,viewing,and debugging.

# Hyphens: Compound Adjectives

Hyphens are used to join compound adjectives together. Compound adjectives are multiple words that come before the noun that they modify.

government-mandated program

the program was government mandated

three-dimensional line

three brown chairs

newly formed committee

# Hyphens: Other Compound Words

Compound words and terms may be open, closed, or hyphenated. In several instances, the spacing/hyphenation can change over time. When in doubt, use a dictionary

a stick-in-the-mud

talk man-to-man

jury-rig the device

# Hyphens: Prefixes

Usually, prefixes are not hyphenated unless the vowel is doubled, the prefix is followed by a proper name, or omitting the hyphen would cause confusion

nonlinear

self-sustaining

re-elect

non-Newtonian

re-cover

# En Dash

En dashes are a little wider than hyphens, and they can be used to represent ranges of numbers. Do not pair an en dash with from or between.

- The final score of the basketball game was 83–97.
- For the American army, World War II lasted from 1939–1945. ❌
- For the American army, World War II lasted from 1939 to 1945. ✅
- She painted her most creative works between 1772–1775. ❌
- She painted her most creative works between 1772 and 1775. ✅

# En Dash

En dashes can also be used to show various relationships between words including conflict, connections, or direction.

She went aboard the St. Louis–Chicago bound train.

Even numbered highways run east–west.

The Hasse–Minkowski theorem is a fundamental result in number theory.

# Em Dash

Em dashes are used to create breaks in a sentence. Depending on the way they are used, these types of dashes can be used in place of commas, parentheses, and colons.

My dog finally came inside—completely covered in mud—after calling him for 20 minutes.

The watch came with a choice of three bands—stainless steel, plastic, or leather.

We were upset by the event's organization—or rather, lack of organization.

# Apostrophes: Possessive Nouns

Apostrophes are used to denote possession. Its position might vary depending on if the word ends in s or if it is singular or plural.

John's pen is running out of ink.

Lucas's pen is running out of ink.

Lucas' pen is running out of ink.

The professors' meeting was supposed to be over by now.

The women's restroom is out of order.



# Apostrophes: Contractions

Apostrophes are also used in contractions. Contractions are formed by joining two words together. While the list of possible contractions is extensive, note that for the most part, contractions are not typically used in formal writing.

He said that he can't make it to the meeting today.

It's all going to be just fine in the end.

That dog loves to chase its tail.

**Note:** It's is the contraction of it is, while its is the possessive form of it.

# Quotation Marks

Quotation marks are most often used when directly quoting another person's words in your own work. Typically, a comma is used to introduce quoted material, but if the text that introduces the quote can stand by itself as an independent clause, then it is appropriate to introduce the quote with a colon.


My doctor told me, "Don't forget to take care of yourself."

"What time is it?" the man asked his neighbor.

His mother always gave him the best advice: "Follow your dreams."

# Parentheses

Parentheses are typically used to introduce extra information to the sentence. Ensure that the sentence maintains subject verb agreement when including information in parentheses.

The elderly woman (accompanied by her dog) walked to the park. 

The elderly woman (and her dog) were walking to the park. 

# Parentheses

Parentheses can also be used to denote abbreviations or acronyms.

The scanning electron microscope (SEM) is a very useful tool.

NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) is on the cutting edge of space exploration.

# Parentheses

Punctuation that is part of the sentence is placed outside of the parentheses. If the parenthetical text is a separate sentence, then the punctuation is placed within the parentheses.

The donors were very grateful that we acknowledged their contributions at our event.  
(Hopefully Dr. Aknowta doesn't find out that we mispronounced her name.)

The gentleman is thrilled to be here (despite the fact that he left his birthday party early), but he would like to get started as soon as possible.

# References

American Psychological Association, & Writing Studio Collection (University of Missouri--Kansas City). (2010). *Publication manual of the American psychological association* (6th ed.). Washington, D.C: American Psychological Association.

Markel, M. (2012). *Technical communication* (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Rude, C. D., & Eaton, A. (2011). *Technical editing* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Longman.

The University of Chicago Press. (2017). *The Chicago manual of style* (17<sup>th</sup> ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.