Using Punctuation Correctly in your Academic Essays
Acknowledgements

- Many thanks to the UNG staff and faculty for providing space and supporting this workshop.
- All quotes—unless otherwise indicated—are from The Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers (7th ed.), another invaluable resource.

- Sidenote: check on ung.edu for additional upcoming workshop!
What Is Punctuation?

- A typographical / visual strategy that clarifies (or adds) meaning in a written text
- Conveys tone, pitch, voice, even body language – anything a speaker does in person
Why Do We Need Punctuation?

- dear john i want a man who knows what love is all about you are generous kind and thoughtful people who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior you have ruined me for other men i yearn for you i have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart i can be forever happy will you let me be yours gloria
Dear John,

I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, and thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you! I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy—will you let me be yours?

Gloria
Punctuation can drastically change the meaning of a phrase

Dear John:

I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous kind and thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me! For other men I yearn; for you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours, Gloria
Categories of Punctuation

- **At the end of a sentence**: periods, exclamation points, question marks, quotation marks.

- **In the middle of a sentence**: commas, dashes, parentheses, semicolons, colons.

- **Between words or letters**: hyphens, slashes, apostrophes.

- The “traffic analogy”: red lights, blinking red lights, yellow lights, alert signs; **commas are like the yellow lights!**
The Comma

- Commas are the most-used form of punctuation.

- **MYTH**: Simply insert a comma wherever you breathe or pause while reading your writing. **FACT**: Breathing and speech patterns vary widely - inserting commas whenever you pause will lead to errors.

*Follow concrete rules instead!*
The Comma

- With coordinating conjunctions to link two independent clauses:
  - Sailing is fun, and it is also good exercise.

- After introductory elements:
  - However, sailing is also a notoriously expensive sport.

- With items in a series ("Harvard comma"):
  - Sunglasses, waterproof clothing, and water shoes are important commodities for sailors.
The Comma

- **With Coordinate Adjectives:**
  - Lasers are small, sleek sailboats.
  - USE COMMAS if adjectives can be separated by “and”!
  - **Incorrect:** …two, young men… …a white, sports car…

- **With Nonrestrictive Adjective Clauses:**
  - The America Cup, which occurs once every three to five years, is the most famous sailboat race.

- **NO COMMAS with Restrictive Adj. Clauses:**
  - Undergraduates who are interested in joining the drama club can do so even if they are beginners.
The Comma

- When introducing quotes (before and during)
  - “If you get hooked on sailing,” my instructor told me, “you’ll also become obsessed with weather.”
  - The captain said, “Let’s bring down the sails!”

- With dates (“month-day-year”)
  - The order was shipped on September 2, 2004, and not received until May 12, 2005.
  - BUT: No comma for “day-month-year” formats:
    - The application deadline was 15 August 2011.
Commas and Dependent Clauses

- A dependent clause has a subject and a verb, but it doesn’t express a complete thought. It is not, therefore, a complete sentence. Often, the clause is marked by a marker word that makes it dependent.

  *When* he goes to the movies,… *After* they left, …

- Dependent clauses are not sentences, but when paired with an independent clause, they can form part of a sentence. The order can vary:

  *When he goes to the movies,* he always spends a lot of money.
  He always spends a lot of money *when he goes to the movies.*
Commas and Dependent Clauses

- Independent clauses contain a subject and a verb and express a complete thought.

  Katie played *World of Warcraft* for several hours.

- If a dependent clause precedes an independent clause, then a comma is needed; otherwise, no comma is needed.

  After she got home, Katie played *World of Warcraft* for several hours.

  but

  Katie played *World of Warcraft* for several hours after she got home.
A few loose ends...

- Use a comma to separate a city name from the state:
  I used to live in Madison, Wisconsin.
  He owns a pig farm in Austin, Texas, and Springfield, Missouri.

- Use a comma when giving long numbers (one comma after every 3 digits):

  4,300,150  4,401 (or 4401)
A few loose ends...

- Use a comma when you address a person, separating the entire sentence and the person’s name:
  
  Jane, do you really think this is necessary?
Now, try your hand at some exercises...
Thanks for Attending!

Please consider scheduling a one-on-one appointment with a Writing Center instructor, who can help you with all aspects of your writing – including punctuation!