At the end of this workshop, students should be able to
• Identify the functions of clauses, elements, modifiers, phrases within sentences.
• Appropriately punctuate elements based on their functions in and among sentences.

This primer provides three guidelines for functional grammar and syntax; it suggests how to punctuate by position and purpose inside the sentence. Terms in boldfaced italics are defined at the end of this document.

1. Consider the nature of the sentence.
   a. Use a simple sentence to address one main idea in one independent clause.
      • You can go straight to the point: “We went to dinner.”
      • You can dress up the idea with modifiers, which can introduce, break up, or follow the independent clause: “After some discussion pertaining to our robust appetites and the lack of any edible comestibles, we went to dinner.” “We, after some discussion pertaining to our robust appetites and the lack of any edible comestibles, went to dinner.” “We went to dinner after some discussion pertaining to our robust appetites and the lack of any edible comestibles.” Notice that, when these phrases introduce or break up the main clause, they are set off with commas.
   b. Use a compound sentence to tie together related ideas using independent clauses.
      • Commas plus coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet) separate independent clauses in compound sentences: “We went to dinner, and then we went to a movie.”
      • Semicolons can replace commas plus coordinate conjunctions: “We went to dinner; then we went to a movie.”
   c. Use a complex sentence combining independent and dependent clauses to tie together two or more related ideas when one is more “important” than the other(s).
      • A subordinating conjunction de-emphasizes the less important idea: “We went to dinner before we went to the movie”; “Before we went to a movie, we went to dinner.” Here, “we went to dinner” is the main idea, and “before” reduces “we went to a movie” to answering “when.” Order can be switched for rhetorical effect. Notice that a comma is used if the subordinate clause introduces the independent clause.
   d. Combine compound and complex sentences, if appropriate, but beware:
      • Length does not always equal strength.
      • Avoid using complex clauses to express complex ideas.

2. Consider the nature of the phrase or dependent clause:
   a. Use commas to set off nonrestrictive modifiers. “All visitors, who are too noisy, must leave the room” tells you that “all visitors” must leave. The phrase between the commas is nonrestrictive (additional) information. In contrast, “All visitors who are too noisy must leave the room” restricts the verb to the “too noisy” visitors, not “all visitors.” This guideline also works for oppositives (modifiers that rename preceding word groups). “My cousin Jimmy left town” suggests which cousin (restrictive), as if you have more than one and you need his name to
identify him. “My cousin, Jimmy, left town” suggests that you only have one cousin, so his name supplies additional, nonrestrictive, information.

b. **Use commas to separate introductory phrases or clauses from the main clause** (See 1a, 1c).

c. **Use commas to separate phrases or clauses** that break up a main clause (See 1a, 1c).

3. Consider the nature of the **element** and its relationship to other **elements, phrases, and clauses**.

   a. **Use commas to separate elements in a series of three or more**: “coffee, tea, and milk” (“closed system”); “coffee, tea and milk” (“open system,” problematic if you don’t know whether you’re being offered a choice of three beverages or two).

   b. **Use semicolons to separate series from series in which commas have already been used**: soup, salad, cheese; chicken, beef, shrimp; carrots, onions, broccoli and cauliflower; cake, pie, mousse; coffee, tea, milk

   c. **Use semicolons to separate independent clauses within a sentence** (See 1b).

   d. **Use single quotation marks (apostrophes)** if double quotation marks have already been used, to note quotations within quotations: “I said, ‘She said, ‘Stop taking me to dinner!’ ’”

   e. **Use a pair of dashes (--) or parentheses** to set off an **interrupting, nonrestrictive modifier**: “The last time I saw a movie—I believe it was The Exorcist—I couldn’t go to dinner after.” “The last time I saw a movie (I believe it was The Exorcist), I couldn’t go to dinner after.”

   f. **Use a colon to follow the salutation of a business letter, to separate references in time, scripture, or titles; and, after, an independent clause** to signal a list, explanation, or quotation:

      - To whom it may concern:
      - Genesis 2:4
      - I need three courses: English, calculus, and chemistry.
      - I know how he feels: “Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.”

A **Primer Glossary**

- **Clause**: a word group containing a subject and predicate. **Independent clauses** can be used alone as sentences; **dependent (subordinate) clauses** are modifiers.

- **Element**: a unit such as a word or punctuation mark within or following a sentence

- **Modifier**: a clause, phrase, or element that is supplemental to the main clause

- **Phrase**: a word group

- **Sentence**: an independent (main) clause with or without the addition of other phrases, clauses, or elements
Practice/workshop for punctuating by position and purpose

1. Nature of sentence
Change these as directed:
- We went to dinner and the theater (Turn into a compound sentence)
- We went to dinner and the theater (Turn into a complex sentence)
- The play was over, and so we went to Mr. G’s. (Turn into a complex sentence)
- We had pepperoni pizza, and then we had fried mozzarella sticks, and then we had garlic bread, and then we had heartburn. (Reduce to a single clause)

2. Nature of modifier
- Woman without her man is nothing.
- Let’s eat Grandma; I’m hungry.
- Mike said Liz burnt the dinner.

3. Nature of the elements
Tallahassee Florida Sacramento California Trenton New Jersey Albany New York

soup salad cheese chicken beef shrimp carrots onions broccoli and cauliflower cake pie mousse coffee tea milk

More questions? Contact the Avery Point Academic Center at 860-405-9058 or email us at apac@uconn.edu.