Punctuation Marks (commas not included)

- The Period

Periods are used to end sentences that are not direct questions or exclamations. They are also used in abbreviations.

Confusion about the period usually occurs when an indirect question is being reported or when a statement is confused with an exclamation. See the Question Mark (I-B) and Exclamation Mark (I-C) sections for examples.

Periods are used to note that an abbreviation has been used. A period is placed after Dr. to indicate that the word doctor has been shortened.

If a sentence ends with a word that has been abbreviated, do not use a second period.

Periods are not used in US Postal Service abbreviations (e.g. Tuscaloosa, AL) or in organization names, academic degrees, and era designations (e.g. IRS, UCLA, PhD, 1066 AD).

- The Question Mark

If a direct question is being asked, it requires a question mark. If the sentence is stating that a question has been asked, however, it needs a period.

a. Direct Questions:

   *When did Elijah get home?*

   *Dominic asked, “When will the meeting be over?”*

b. Indirect Question:
Gabrielle asked when the meeting would be over.

- The Exclamation Point

  Exclamation points should only be used to end sentences that are truly exclamations. Be careful not to overuse them.

  \textit{My hair is on fire!}
  
  Not an Exclamation:

  \textit{I told Evelyn to go home.}

- Parentheses

  Parentheses should be used to enclose supplemental information, minor departures from the subject, and afterthoughts.

  \textit{The Southeastern states (AL, MS, GA, etc) experience very humid summers.}

  \textit{The architecture of the building (not the size) is what made it so appealing.}

- The Dash

  Dashes can be used to set off supplemental information, to set off appositives, to set up a list, or to note a dramatic shift in tone.

  a. Supplemental Information

    \textit{Much like parentheses, dashes can be used to enclose relevant—but not necessary—information.}

  b. Appositives

    An appositive is either a noun or noun phrase that renames another noun near it:
Dr. Lawless—my theory professor—assigned homework for tonight.

My theory professor is a noun phrase that renamed Dr. Lawless.

c. Lists and Shifts in Tone

Either a colon or a dash can be used to mark the beginning of a list. A colon is more formal than the dash.

Constance’s kitchen was full of junk food—sodas, potato chips, cookies, and chocolate.

A dash can be used to mark a tone change that occurs mid-sentence.

Casey stepped up to the plate, swung the bat mightily—and struck out.

• Brackets

Brackets should be used to include information in a word-for-word quotation that was implied but not stated in the original context. Oftentimes when a quote is being reproduced out of its original context, extra information needs to be provided in order for the new audience to understand the meaning.

“He [Edgar Allan Poe] is credited with being the inventor of the short story.”

Without the information in brackets the reader would not know to whom the quote was referring.

• The Ellipses

Quite the opposite of brackets, ellipses should be used to note that information from a word-for-word quote has been omitted. They are not needed when information has been omitted from the
beginning or the end of a quotation, but only when information is left out somewhere in the middle.

“Four score and seven years ago our forefathers brought forth on this continent a new nation…dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

Ellipses can also be used to denote hesitation or an unfinished thought.

“I…love…you,” Henry gasped slowly with his dying breaths.

“But I…,” Beau tried to speak, but words failed him.

• The Slash

Slashes are used to separate two or three lines of poetry or lyrics that are being included in text. More than 3 lines of poetry or lyrics should be inserted as a block quote and does not use slashes (see section on quotation marks):

“The mirror crack’d from side to side; / ‘The curse is come upon me,’ cried / The Lady of Shallot.”