

Punctuation: An Approach to Teaching It Effectively

Donald C. Samson, Jr.

Radford University

This paper describes an approach to teaching business writing students how to use American punctuation. It incorporates guidelines from a variety of sources and describes limited instruction in sentence structure (clauses versus phrases, types of clauses, and types of conjunctions) that will help students understand punctuation guidelines and use punctuation effectively. Few business writing instructors look forward to teaching punctuation, and fewer business writing students look forward to studying it, but when punctuation is addressed as suggested here, the process might result in less discomfort for all, and better sentence-level writing.

Punctuation is a mystery to some and a source of entertainment for readers of books like Eats, Shoots and Leaves. It is a serious concern for writers in business and government because it helps writers clarify and emphasize meaning in a sentence, and because many readers in business expect the punctuation in a document to conform to established usage, to be “correct.” Lesikar, Flatley, and Rentz open their chapter on “Correctness of Communication” with a hypothetical situation in which a letter containing errors in punctuation and grammar creates a negative impression on the reader; they go on to state, “The correctness of your communication will be important to you and your company. . . . People judge a company by how its employees act, think, talk, and write. Company executives want such judgments to be favorable” (p. 503). Correctness in grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation is important, but these elements of writing often receive insufficient attention in first-year composition classes, so business writing instructors may need to address them. Students’ problems with grammar and sentence structure are best addressed in individual conferences, but through in-class instruction punctuation can be taught efficiently and effectively.

The punctuation guidelines in the major business writing texts cover satisfactorily the different uses of punctuation, so some easier marks of punctuation such as colons and dashes for emphasis and parentheses for additional information are not discussed here. Some of the more difficult punctuation uses are examined, however. Understanding the more difficult (or controversial) punctuation guidelines is easier if students understand some grammar concepts such as main clauses and the types of conjunctions, so some teaching of grammar is usually helpful. Some guidance about punctuation practice is best provided one-on-one in discussion of the student’s writing, but some instruction about grammar and punctuation can be provided more expeditiously in class. This paper focuses on teaching American, not British, punctuation; Ober

(2006, p. 54) and Truss (2003, p. xxiv) have pointed out significant differences between the two systems.

Some Assumptions

Punctuation helps readers derive meaning from sentences by providing visible clues to sentence structure and emphasis. Writers should know how to punctuate correctly to convey ideas and information in such a way that the readers understand each sentence quickly and easily on first reading. Some students know how to punctuate well (by “ear”) when they enter a business writing course even if they cannot explain why. Punctuation can be learned, but teaching punctuation is no more entertaining for most instructors than is studying punctuation.

Some students may have learned how to punctuate correctly in a course but may have forgotten how once that course was over and they no longer had to write papers on which the grade was based partly on the quality of the writing. Other students’ punctuation problems may result from insufficient instruction in punctuation in English or writing courses. Frequently, composition courses are taught by instructors who may not themselves have been taught how to punctuate correctly, or instructors who have so much more work to do to improve student’s writing skills that there just isn’t enough time to address punctuation problems (but there always seems to be enough time to teach the research paper).

Even in a business writing course, it’s better not to focus on too many uses of a mark of punctuation. Ober (2008) has indicated that “comprehensive style manuals . . . routinely give more than 100 rules for using the comma” (p. 344). Asking students or writers to learn many guidelines will make them apprehensive; five or six comma guidelines will do in most situations, and widely used business writing texts offer from three to fifteen. Instead, instructors might encourage students or businesspeople to have their writing edited by someone who does know all the “rules” (and knows when to break them).

Showing how punctuation can improve sentence clarity can help students recognize that punctuation exists to help writers clarify their meaning and to help readers perceive that meaning. If punctuation is “taught” outside the context of a concern for sentence clarity and emphasis, students might see punctuation guidelines as rules that must be learned to avoid errors.

Although the usual approach is to interpret punctuation as a system of visible clues to structure and meaning, punctuation is still described in some trade books as a substitute for pauses in speech. Elliott (2006) and Stevenson (2005) do so; more on this below.

“Down-style” (less punctuation) is preferred by modern writers, editors, and readers. “Unnecessary” punctuation can be misleading and therefore is to be avoided. Goldstein (2007) argues that “punctuation is to make clear the thought being expressed,” and “if punctuation does not help make clear what is being said, it should not be there” (p. 322). This point may seem obvious, but many students who had teachers who dismissed an “unnecessary comma” as an inconsequential error may need to be convinced that unnecessary punctuation is not a trivial

problem, as it might affect the reader's interpretation of the sentence.

Only those who know how to punctuate correctly should teach students how to punctuate. Many teachers assume that they punctuate correctly but do not, sometimes as a result of reading and doing too much academic writing. A good way for instructors to test their ability to punctuate is to see what a copyeditor at a journal or book publisher did to the punctuation in their manuscript (and if the instructors are not writing for publication, they shouldn't be teaching expository or business writing).

These assumptions underlie the approach to teaching punctuation presented here. Some of the assumptions may be debatable, but agreement with them is not necessary for instructors to consider the tactics presented below and adapt them to meet their students' needs.

Explaining Expectations about Punctuation

Most composition students are not taught that readers have certain expectations when they see punctuation in a sentence. When readers see "John called Susan, and . . ." they expect that a new subject (not John) and a new verb will follow in the sentence. When they see "Near the end of the report, . . ." they expect to see the beginning of the main clause (or another introductory element that postpones it, as in "Near the end of the report, in the next-to-last Appendix, . . ."). When they see "Cathy drives a bright, red car" they will stumble. Part of teaching punctuation is helping students to recognize a reader's expectations and to avoid situations in which the sentence conflicts with readers' expectations.

Readers of most business documents expect punctuation to be used conventionally and correctly. Lesikar, Flatley, and Rentz (2008) stress correctness as a way to develop a favorable image of an organization. They use several examples of sentences that change meaning when punctuated differently to illustrate their point about punctuation in the chapter "Correctness of Communication." But the samples (which do not contain errors) seem to reinforce instead the point that punctuation is important to meaning rather than correctness (pp. 503-4). Their text does, however, discuss punctuation in the body of the text rather than an appendix, rightly emphasizing the importance of punctuation.

Confronting the "Pause" Approach

The most troublesome aspect of punctuation for many instructors is the idea that punctuation indicates where the writer would pause if he or she were reading aloud. This approach is presented in trade books much more often than in textbooks. Woods (2001) begins her chapter on commas "Aloud, commas are the sound of silence – short pauses that contrast with the longer pauses at the end of each sentence" (p. 181). Stevenson (2005) titles his chapter on commas, semicolons, and colons "Pausing for Breath" but says that the "purpose of punctuation is . . . to make writing easier to read and understand" (p. 125). Elliott (2006) recommends that writers "think of commas as pauses to take a breath" (p. 69). Lederer (2005) recommends using punctuation where the writer would pause if reading the text aloud: "when in doubt about [punctuating] a sentence, read it aloud. Notice where you naturally find yourself pausing –

where, in effect, you *must* pause. Chances are that'll be a good place for a comma" (p. 39). Even Locker and Kienzler (2008) lean this way when they say "Do not use commas to separate the subject from the verb, even if you would take a breath after a long subject" (p. 639).

To connect punctuation more clearly to meaning than speech, the APA Publication Manual (2001) redefines *pause*: "punctuation of a sentence usually denotes a pause in thought; different kinds of punctuation indicate different kinds and lengths of pauses" (p. 78). Guffey (2007) argues that "commas should not be inserted merely because you might drop your voice if you were speaking the sentence" (p. GM27). Locker and Kienzler do argue that "Commas aren't breaths. Instead, like other punctuation, they're road signs" (p. 635). Cappon (2003) observes that "the so-called breath comma survived well into the era when nobody read aloud anymore" (p. 6).

The analogy of punctuation to road maps or road signs is one popular way to interpret punctuation that avoids the pause approach. "Punctuation marks are road signs to help readers predict what comes next," according to Locker and Kienzler (2008, p. 634). For Ober (2008), "punctuation serves as a roadmap to help guide the reader through the twists and turns of your message" (p. 344). (Here's hoping that most messages don't have twists.) Elliott (2006) indicates that "punctuation marks do the same things for a sentence that road signs do for a highway. Punctuation marks tell the reader when to speed up, when to slow down, when to stop, and what to expect up the road" (p. 69). For Cappon (2003), "punctuation in skilled hands is a remarkably subtle system of signals, signs, symbols and winks that keep readers on the smooth road" (p. 1).

The "road signs" approach may be a middle ground between the "pause" approach and the idea that punctuation should clarify meaning. Ober (2008) suggests that "sometimes correct punctuation is absolutely essential for comprehension" (p. 344). Truss (2004) emphasizes the use of punctuation to assist readers, noting that it has "aided the clarity of the written word for the past half-millennium" (p. 7). She cites a newspaper style book that calls punctuation "'a courtesy designed to help readers understand a story without stumbling'" (p. xxvii). Woods (2001) emphasizes the use of punctuation to clarify meaning: "each comma in your sentence should have a reason for being there. The most important reason, of course, is to make your meaning clear" (p. 325). Cappon (2003) similarly emphasizes meaning: "punctuation links or separates sentences and their elements, avoids ambiguities, clarifies meanings and sometimes refines them" (p. 2). Gibaldi's MLA Handbook (the reference guide most widely used in composition courses) tells writers, "the primary purpose of punctuation is to ensure the clarity and readability of writing . . . it adds meaning to written words and guides the understanding of readers as they move through sentences" (2003, p. 80).

According to Mann (2003), "most authorities see to agree . . . that modern punctuation 'overlaps' functionally with spoken-language devices such as pause and intonation, rather than 'repeating' them; historically, it's becoming increasingly syntactic but still has some prosodic functions" (p. 391). Instructors might emphasize that most experts interpret punctuation as visible symbols that help clarify the structure and the meaning of written statements rather than as pause markers.

Many students and business writers will admit they were taught to put in a comma wherever they would pause when reading a sentence aloud. And it can be difficult to explain to students diplomatically that the “pause” approach was taught them by people who didn’t mind oversimplification.

Teaching Most Punctuation Guidelines Later

Students will be surprised if an instructor says “We’re not going to worry about punctuation until later in the course, so I don’t want you to worry about it now either.” However, this approach can be valuable, as it encourages students to focus on other aspects of business writing that are more important in a document, such as questions of content for a resume or strategy in a letter of application or a proposal.

Teaching punctuation later in any course or workshop mirrors when punctuation should be focused on in the writing process: later, after writing and revising, during editing and proofreading. If writers disregard punctuation when they write and instead consider punctuation when they revise and edit later, the composing process is easier for them. In revising to achieve clarity or accomplish their objective, writers should ask whether each mark of punctuation clarifies sentence structure and/or meets readers’ expectations.

Also, many students and writers need instruction in combining and editing sentences before they address punctuation. Providing the students with sentences that need revision (not punctuating) and helping students learn how to revise sentences should precede systematic discussion of punctuation, since punctuation doesn’t solve sentence structure problems but instead clarifies the structure of good sentences.

One exception to teaching punctuation later might be the use of the apostrophe, given the widespread confusion of “its” and “it’s.” Sample sentences like “It’s clear that KPZ has lost its competitive edge” can clarify the contraction “it’s” (usually for “it is”) from the possessive form “its.” During the course, individual students might need repeated practice using the two forms correctly; writing sentences using both forms in each sentence can help.

Emphasizing Sentence Clarity and Revising

Convincing the students that sentence clarity matters is essential to helping them develop their writing skills. A sentence like “John told Jim that he should email Susan” may be clear to the writer but won’t be to a reader. Students see that it cannot be fixed with punctuation; it needs rewording. The instructor might give students guidelines for revising sentences for clarity and emphasis, and then he or she might follow-up with sentence revising assignments. This approach can establish that clarifying the meaning of a sentence often calls for revising wording rather than figuring out how to punctuate it.

The instructor might invite students to write on the board sentences they weren’t sure how to punctuate, and then discuss the punctuation in each sentence with the group. Sentence by sentence, the instructor might first ask students whether the wording of the sentence might be

changed to clarify its meaning. If so, the students should be invited to recommend changes (which helps the students to learn how to give and accept recommendations to improve sentence-level writing, as well as learn to revise sentences). Once the wording of the sentence is appropriate, the students might then be asked whether any changes to its punctuation would improve its clarity and emphasis. Usually this results in questions like “Should there be that comma after ‘report’?” or “Would a semicolon after ‘manager’ be OK?” At this point, students might be encouraged not to suggest that any punctuation is “wrong.” The students’ questions allow the instructor to begin to introduce guidelines about punctuation practice that meet readers’ expectations as well as solve a problem in sentence clarity, such as the use of a comma after an introductory element.

Emphasizing clarity and revising can help students see that punctuation can’t save a poorly built sentence but can help clarify a sentence. It’s risky for the instructor, as he or she has to be able to revise sentences and explain the punctuation extemporaneously during class, but students and writers profit from the discussion (and the instructor’s credibility increases). Discussing a few sentences in each or every other class meeting is a good way to help students become familiar with punctuation practice even before the “rules” are examined.

Instructors might also give students sentences in which the wording is appropriate but punctuation is required to clarify the meaning. For example, readers of “John told Jim to email Susan and Tom agreed” might stumble. But correct punctuation can keep readers from stumbling and then having to reread the sentence to get its meaning. Several examples of sentences requiring punctuation for clarity might be given the students before any discussion of punctuation guidelines takes place.

To help students realize that clarity is worth the effort, instructors might give them famous business people’s statements about the importance of clarity (and emphasis) in business writing, and accounts of situations in which a lack of clarity resulted in rework or the failure of a proposal or a job application.

Introducing Punctuation Guidelines Gradually

After several class meetings in which the students offer suggestions to revise and/or punctuate student-generated sentences, the instructor might begin to introduce punctuation guidelines, the most frequent or simplest first, still without discussing grammar or sentence structure. For example, the sentence “John told Jim to email Susan, and Tom agreed” can be discussed as an example in which two statements that could stand by themselves as complete sentences are joined, since they are short and not complicated, to suggest that they are logically related. The instructor might then present other sentences of this pattern to clarify this usage, and then present examples in which a semicolon might or should be used to join the two statements (sentences). At this point, there’s no need to bring up the terms *independent clause*, *main clause*, or *coordinating conjunction*, just the idea of a sentence and the familiar tendency to join shorter, closely related sentences.

Other punctuation guidelines might then be addressed the same way (especially the use of the apostrophe, and the comma for items in a series), saving the most difficult punctuation uses, such as the comma with non-restrictive information, until later. If it comes up in class discussion, the instructor should be quick to provide a sample sentence that clarifies that comma use. For example, students might be given the sentences “My son Devon lives near Boston” and “My son, Devon, lives near Boston” and asked the difference between them. Some students will need the difference explained, and in explaining the instructor might indicate that this use of the comma will be discussed later in the course.

One of the most important considerations in teaching business writing is what to cover when. Different punctuation guidelines/uses might be discussed at different points in the course rather than in a unit on punctuation that removes punctuation from its proper focus on sentence clarity and emphasis. To discuss punctuation in an appendix in a business writing text (which most except Lesikar, Flatley, and Rentz do) may be to deemphasize the subject, since appendixes are the places to tuck away discussion.

Teaching Enough Grammar

For decades, writing theorists have argued that teaching grammar doesn't make students better writers. Granted, being able to provide an example of an object complement is not a necessary condition for writing well. But it is difficult to address individual student's problems with, say, subject-verb agreement or sentence fragments without talking with the student about subjects, verbs, and sentence fragments. Some composition instructors might deemphasize grammar in writing instruction to encourage beginning or reluctant writers to write, but business writing students might be motivated instead by reading about how important good writing will be to them in their careers.

In a classic text on teaching writing, Shaughnessy concluded that “punctuation is a response to sentence structure . . . [and] the study of punctuation ought to be a study of sentence structure, not merely a definition of the marks themselves” (1977, p. 20). Dawkins (1995) suggests that “conventional punctuation is grammar based – marks are prescribed in terms of grammatical structure” (p. 7).

Punctuation can be “taught” without much grammar terminology. Mann's essay on teaching punctuation, perhaps the most systematic to date, acknowledges that to learn punctuation, students need “a minimal degree of sentence sense” – the ability to distinguish a sentence fragment from a main clause. Mann stresses the need to make sure that writers can recognize a fragment but warns against “too much emphasis on . . . terminology [because it] confuses the larger number of students who may never have heard the term ‘nonfinite verb’ (or gerund, participle, or infinitive) but who nevertheless, have grasped intuitively that an –ing form is ‘not enough verb’ to make a statement” (2003, p. 385).

After students have experience revising sentences for clarity and emphasis, instructors might clarify the difference between finite and nonfinite verb forms, to help students distinguish a clause (which contains a subject and a finite verb) from a phrase (which doesn't contain both).

Proceedings of the 2008 Association for Business Communication Convention
Copyright © 2008, Association for Business Communication

Enabling students to see the difference helps them punctuate compound sentences correctly, and it helps them avoid sentence fragments. It isn't necessary to identify and discuss infinitives, participles, and gerunds, as Mann (2003) suggests. Once students understand what a verb is, they can distinguish finite from nonfinite verb forms by asking if a particular verb could with a subject and no other verb forms make a complete sentence. Suggesting that "finite" means "defined" sometimes helps; the best example would be forms like "is" and "writes," which indicate clearly (define) the person, number, tense, voice, and mood.

Then moving on to helping students distinguish main clauses from subordinate ("dependent") clauses, and to distinguish coordinating conjunctions from conjunctive adverbs, might facilitate discussion of sentence revising (by being able to recommend placing important ideas in main rather than in subordinate clauses) and prepare students to understand more complex uses of punctuation.

Some textbooks introduce unnecessary grammar terminology in teaching punctuation. For example, in a discussion of comma use one writer discusses the need for a comma after a "vocative" (a name in direct address). Why bother to trouble students with the term "vocative"? Occasionally students need help with the discussion of grammar in business writing texts. For example, Lesikar, Flatley, and Rentz (2008) tell students "Do not use an adverbial clause as a noun clause. Clauses beginning with *because, when, where, if* . . . are not properly used as subjects, objects, or complements of verbs" (p. 515). But what of the sentence "Where she went to college isn't the issue; I want to know if she can do the job," in which one adverbial noun clause functions as a subject and another as the object of the infinitive?

Many articles on teaching grammar and punctuation appear in publications aimed at teachers in two-year colleges rather than four-year schools, such as Blaauw-Hara's (2006) and Dawkin's (2003), but journals that tend to focus more on instruction in four-year schools, such as College Composition and Communication, have published articles by Mann (2003), Hassett (1996), Beason (2001), and others.

Teaching punctuation through discussion of sentence structure rather than having students study the appropriate section in the handbook in the business writing text and then complete the exercises in the text can help students see that concern for punctuation is a concern for clarity at the sentence level. It encourages students to see concern for punctuation as part of the polishing of a document, an important part but not an end in itself. In this regard, punctuation is like spelling, which writers also might be encouraged not to worry about as they are drafting a document, lest concern for spelling distract them from developing and controlling content and organization to achieve their purpose.

Identifying Main Clauses and Coordinating Conjunctions

In class meetings, the instructor might review some sentence concepts such as main and subordinate clauses, clauses versus phrases, and coordinating conjunctions, introducing the concepts before emphasizing terminology. Dawkins (1995) stresses the importance of the main clause in punctuating correctly: "to understand the principles . . . one grammatical element must

Proceedings of the 2008 Association for Business Communication Convention
Copyright © 2008, Association for Business Communication

be recognized – the independent clause,” which he calls “the basic element in prose,” not the sentence (pp. 534-535). Mann (2003) eschews the use of the terms “independent clause” and “subordinate clause” because “a substantial majority [of student writers] aren’t comfortable with the terms” (p. 15). It is not difficult, though, for business writing students and writers in business to learn a few terms. Another advantage to teaching the main clause is to encourage writers to place important ideas in main clauses rather than subordinate clauses, for emphasis.

Once the students understand the difference between a main clause and a subordinate (dependent) clause, the instructor can clarify the use of the comma with a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*) to join complete sentences (main clauses) and to help students recognize sentence fragments. The most frequent problem with this comma use is in sentences like “John drafted the report on the Simpkins project and sent it to this manager to review.” Many writers insert a comma after “project” on the grounds that “he” is understood as the subject of “sent,” so the sentence has two main clauses. It doesn’t, however; the sentence has a compound verb and is similar to “John slipped and fell down.” Using this shorter sentence as an example can help students recognize the difference between a sentence that does have two main clauses joined with a coordinating conjunction (and therefore requiring a comma before the coordinating conjunction) and a sentence that has a compound verb and therefore should not have a comma before the simple conjunction.

Distinguishing coordinating conjunctions from conjunctive adverbs (*however, thus, etc.*) also helps students and writers punctuate correctly sentences with more than one main (independent) clause. Most business writing texts identify *and, but, or, and nor* as coordinating (or “coordinate”) conjunctions. Lehman and DuFrene (2008) and Guffey (2008) add *for*; Bovée and Thill (2008) list only *and, but, and or*. Only Guffey (2008) indicates that *so* and *yet* may also function as coordinating conjunctions.

A good way to help students distinguish coordinating conjunctions from other words that can connect main clauses (conjunctive adverbs) is to note that the coordinating conjunctions have only two or three letters but conjunctive adverbs have four or more letters or are more than one word (such as “as a result”). Then it is easier for students to meet readers’ expectations (and avoid a comma splice) when using a comma to join two main clauses.

Teaching Some Comma Uses

For students and writers, the most difficult comma usage is to set off non-essential (“non-restrictive”) information. This comma usage is difficult to teach because students and writers must learn to decide how essential a word, phrase, or clause is to the meaning of their sentence. This comma use is clear in sentences such as “Send the report to Susan Smith, the Director of Marketing” or “We could not complete the report by June 1, when it was due.” In both cases, additional information about Susan Smith and June 1 is set off because the meaning of the sentence is clear without it. But in the sentences “Send the report to the manager who requested it” and “We could not complete the report by the day when it was due,” no comma should be used, because the sentences would not be complete without “who requested it” and “when it was

due.” One approach to helping students decide whether to set off information is to invite them to leave it out and see if the sentence makes sense – seems complete – without it

Helping students or writers learn to use a comma to set off an introductory element (word, phrase, or clause) is easier, but business writing texts disagree about the introductory comma. Lehman and DuFrene (2008) recommend one for “prepositional phrases and verbal phrases with five or more words”(p. C8). Bovée and Thill (2008) recommend a comma after “a dependent clause at the beginning of a sentence” (p. H15) and after an introductory phrase or word (H16) but say that with “short introductory prepositional phrases and some one-syllable words (such as hence and thus), the comma is often omitted” (p. H16). Ober (2008) does not specify length but says to “use a comma after an introductory expression” (p. 346). For Cappon (2003), “unless they are very short, a few words, introductions are always followed by a comma” (p. 40). Decisions about this comma use are easier when students can recognize the subject and finite verb in a main clause. An only slightly oversimplified explanation of this comma use is to set off any phrase or subordinate clause that comes before the subject of the first main clause in the sentence.

Most students remember that the serial comma is “optional,” possibly because for once it seemed that they had some choice about whether to use a comma. However, many students were not told that using serial comma should be based not on their preference but on the needs of the sentence. Some sentences are clearer when the comma is used, as is discussed in most business writing texts, which recommend using the serial comma.

Teaching Students One-on-One

After punctuation has been discussed in class meetings or workshop sessions, punctuation errors in a student’s writing might best be addressed in individual conferences. Individual conferences focusing on a document the student created will be more helpful than class discussion of sample sentences by other writers, especially if there are problems with commas to set off non-restrictive phrases. In an individual conference, many students are less reluctant to ask questions, and it is easier for the instructor to make sure the student understands.

Conclusion

In a business writing course, punctuation is best taught gradually rather than as a unit or module, after students have learned to recognize problems in sentence clarity and learned how to fix them. The approaches suggested here might help business writing instructors teach punctuation. Other approaches work too. Determining a students’ ability to punctuate by examining samples of the students’ writing rather than their score on a diagnostic exercise might indicate more accurately what they do when they write. Instructors might examine first-year composition texts and talk to the composition program director at their school to find out what is being taught about punctuation in composition classes. Instructors might invite students to examine passages from well-edited business newspapers and journals and discuss why each mark of internal punctuation is used, to see that punctuation conventions are followed in business publications. Instructors might remind students that unconventional punctuation in “creative” writing is often

within the range of expectations for its readers but at variance with what readers of business documents would expect. Above all, instructors might plan their own approach to incorporating punctuation into their teaching of business writing, considering how to make teaching punctuation less painful for themselves and their students but at the same time emphasizing the link between punctuation and communicating effectively.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Beason, L. (2001). Ethos and error: How business people react to errors. *College Composition and Communication* 53:1, 33-64.
- Blaauw-Hara, M. (2006). Why our students need instruction in grammar, and how we should go about it. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 34:2, 165-78.
- Bovée, C., Thill, J., & Schatzman, B. (2008) *Business communication today* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Cappon, R. (2003). *The Associated Press guide to punctuation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Dawkins, J. (2003). Teaching meaning-based punctuation. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. 31:2, 154-162.
- (1995). Teaching punctuation as a rhetorical tool. *College Composition and Communication* 46.4, 533-548.
- Elliott, R. (2006). *Painless Grammar* (2nd ed.). Hauppauge, NY: Barron's.
- Gibaldi, J., ed. (2003). *Modern Language Association handbook for writers of research papers* (6th ed.). New York: Modern Language Association.
- Goldstein, N., ed. (2007). *The Associated Press stylebook and briefing on media law* (Rev. ed.). New York: Basic Books.
- Guffey, M. E. (2008). *Business communication: Process and product* (6th ed.). Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage.
- (2007). *Essentials of business communication* (7th ed.). Mason, OH: Thomson South-Western.
- Hassett, M. (1996). "Toward a broader understanding of the rhetoric of punctuation." *College Composition and Communication* 47:3.
- Lederer, R., with Shore, J. (2005). *Comma sense: A fundamental guide to punctuation*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Lehman, C., and DuFrene, D. (2008) *Business communication* (15th ed.). Mason, OH: Thomson South-Western.

- Lesikar, R., Flatley, M., and Rentz, K. (2008) *Business communication: Making connections in a digital world* (11th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill Irwin.
- Locker, K., and Kienzler, D. (2008). *Business and administrative communication* (8th ed.). Boston: Irwin McGraw Hill.
- Mann, N. Point counterpoint: Teaching punctuation as information management. *College Composition and Communication* 54:3 (February 2003), 359-393.
- Ober, S. (2006). *Contemporary business communication* (6th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- (2008). *Fundamentals of contemporary business communication* (6th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Shaughnessy, M. (1977). *Errors & expectations: A guide for the teacher of basic writing*. New York; Oxford University Press.
- Stevenson, J. (2005). *The Pocket Idiot's guide to grammar and punctuation*. New York: Penguin.
- Truss, L. (2004). *Eats, shoots & leaves: The zero tolerance approach to punctuation*. New York: Penguin.
- Woods, G. (2001). *English grammar for dummies*. Hoboken: Wiley.

Biography

DON SAMSON teaches professional writing, editing, and Shakespeare at Radford University, in Virginia. His PhD is from UNC - Chapel Hill. A former proposal writer in aerospace and instructional designer for software developers, he is the author of Editing Technical Writing (Oxford UP). For fun, he fly-fishes and helps coach the Radford University men's rugby team, the 2008 Division II national champions.