**Does Punctuation Really Matter?**

So, you put in the work, drafting, revising, and editing, and you submit your perfectly polished essay to your instructor. This is the one! This will finally boost your grade to an A.

Then, a few days later, it comes back covered in red ink!

What happened?

You scour the pages, and paragraph after paragraph, the comma has sabotaged you.

But, who cares? It’s just a comma. Right!?

**Eats, Shoots and Leaves**

A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air.

“Why?” asks the confused waiter, as the panda heads towards the exit.

The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it on the bar.

“I’m a panda,” he says when he reaches the door. “Look it up.”

The waiter turns to the relevant entry and, sure enough, finds an explanation:

*Panda: Large, black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves.*

**Why does it matter???**

Using a comma after the word “eats” changes the message and implies that the panda does all three things. He eats. He shoots. He leaves. Without a comma after “eats” the panda “eats shoots and leaves” which is the intended message.

**“Now I must go and get on my lover.”**

**“Now I must go and get on, my lover.”**

The first sentence sounds like a case of afternoon delight while the second sentence indicates the lovers are about to go their separate ways.

**A woman without her man is nothing.**

**A woman: without her, man is nothing.**

The commas in the first sentence make it sounds like, in order to amount to anything, a woman needs a man while the second sentence with the colon indicates that a man is nothing unless he has a woman.

**Let’s eat grandma.**

**Let’s eat, grandma.**

No! We don’t want to eat grandma as the first sentence suggests. Let’s go with the second sentence which invites grandma to go eat with us.

**I like cooking pets and my family.**

**I like cooking, pets, and my family.**

Again, I don’t think anyone reading this cooks their pets and their families as the first sentence suggests. The commas in the second sentence show items in a series which are liked by the writer – cooking, pets and family.

Headline: Punctuation Ruins Relationship…

**Dear Jack,**

**I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, 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,**

**Jill**

Headline: Punctuation Saves Relationship…

**Dear Jack,**

**I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, 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?**

**Jill**

So, what happened?

The punctuation in these paragraphs completely changes the implied meaning. The first paragraph makes Jack sound like a real loser while in the second paragraph, Jill sounds like she really loves Jack.

Correct and incorrect use of the apostrophe

**The Clinton’s at Former President Reagan’s funeral, and now, theres a story going around.**

**I cannot vouch for the truth of it, but apparently, during the service, the Clinton’s dozed off.**

**As the story goes, Former President Reagan sat up in his casket and said ...**

**“I see the Clinton’s are finally sleeping together.”**

The apostrophe in the word “Clintons” implies possession, not plurality. The apostrophe implies one Clinton is owning something, not that two Clintons were in attendance.

The term “theres” implies two locations which is not actually a proper way to refer to multiple locations. “There’s” is the correct form because we are actually saying “there is.”

**So how does this fix your grade?**

The next time you revise your work, think about what your punctuation is telling your reader.

Take some time to read your work out loud. Emphasize the pauses in your punctuation. Is that what you meant to say?

Consider possession and abbreviations. The easiest way to correct apostrophe issues is to eliminate all contractions (don’t, won’t, can’t).

Then, consider does this subject own something?

Punctuation takes time to correct, and with time, these choices will become automatic. The first step is finding your punctuation errors, and this only happens when we take the time to focus on them.