Outline

- Sentences:
  - Topic position
  - Stress position(s)
  - Fragments
  - Subject-verb agreement
  - Length
- Paragraphs
- Punctuation.
A sentence usually deals with only one topic.

- Readers will interpret what you put at the beginning of your sentence as the topic:
  i.e., Who or what your sentence is about.
The **topic** presents the context for what is to come:

- Should be something that readers are already familiar with, either because it is:
  
  (a) common knowledge, or

  (b) something you introduced earlier

- Then you develop the **topic** by adding new information.
Endings are power positions:
- Your last words carry the greatest weight
- The ending of a sentence is the stress
- Use the power of the stress by putting the key words there:
  - e.g., your main message and new ideas or terms.
Each sentence should have one key message

Every **correct** sentence contains a *subject* (the thing doing the action or being something) *and a main verb* (the action or state of being).

e.g., “I ran” is a simple sentence.

Avoid sentence fragments:

- These are parts of a sentence but do not contain a subject and a main verb (thus making them incomplete).

Often students put what should have been the end of one sentence (after a comma), into a sentence on its own.
Sentence Fragments Example:
Matheson et al. (2007, p. 31) found the time efficiency of this equation to be negligible. Which reinforces these findings. ✗

Example corrected:
Matheson et al. (2007, p. 31) found the time efficiency of this equation to be negligible, which reinforces these findings. ✓
In every sentence the *subject* (the thing doing the action or being something) and a *main verb* (the action or state of being) should always agree in the form that they take – if one is past tense, plural, third person... the other needs to match, or agree, with it.

**Subject-Verb Disagreement Example:**

The construction of both high and low rise buildings on unstable ground have significant problems that need to be addressed.  

“Have” should be “has” because the singular simple subject (construction) needs the singular verb (has).
Academic Writing: Sentence length

- Longer sentences *do not* make your writing sound more “scientific”.
- *They make your writing more confusing!*
  - Keep *most* of your sentences short and simple – to the point without too many extra phrases and clauses interrupting your meaning.
You may be able to reduce your sentence length by dividing complex sentences into separate phrases or sentences.

Example 1:

*If a breakdown occurs it is important that alternative supplies are available and the way that this is done is for the power stations to be linked through the high voltage transmission lines so that all of them contribute to the total supply of energy and an unexpectedly large demand can be handled.*

- Break these sentences at conjunctions and start new ones.
- Ensure that you make the subject of the next section clear with a noun or pronoun.
If a breakdown occurs it is important that alternative supplies are available. This can be achieved by linking power stations through the high voltage transmission lines. They can all then contribute to the total supply of energy, thus allowing an unexpectedly large demand to be handled.
For variation, **occasional** use of longer sentences is ok but check them carefully to ensure that your meaning is clear and that they are not ambiguous.
Each paragraph should deal with **one** key point:
- Paragraphs are like short stories—they deal with one main point only
- When this is done properly, repetition can be avoided
- Build sentences around your main point
  - The last sentence in each paragraph is *often* the main thing your reader takes away

Justify your arguments and ideas:
- Support your arguments and ideas with relevant evidence
- Use the overall flow of your paragraphs in your report to build the story:
  - Use your main ideas to push along your story.
Good punctuation is key to ensuring that your audience and you read something the same way (see example below from Lynn Truss in *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*).

“A woman: without her, man is nothing.”

“A woman, without her man, is nothing.”
Academic Writing: Punctuation

Use correct punctuation:

Comma (,)

1. Use a comma:
   - After each item in a list but *generally not* before the final *and*:
     - *(adjectives)* The river is wide, turbulent and muddy.
     - *(nouns)* The most common birds on the island are sparrows, chaffinches, thrushes and blackbirds.
     - *(phrases)* The river mouth is wide, with large shingle banks, extensive sand-dunes and a small island.
   - However, sometimes you *will need* a comma before the final *and*:
     - We invited the strippers, JFK and Stalin.

Comma (,)

2. Use a comma:
   - To delimit a sub-clause from the main clause in a sentence:
     - When the engine was run on petrol, the carbon emissions were higher, which was an indication of improved mixing.

3. Use a comma:
   - After an introductory phrase or sub-phrase:
     - By using better management practices, farmers have been able to reduce their pesticide use

Comma (,)

4. Use a **comma**:  
   - To delimit material that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence:
     - The island, although windswept, has a large number of bird species.

Full Stop (.)

- Use a **full stop** to separate two sentences.

  - e.g., The spill caused the level of toxins in the river to rise. As a result, the entire fish population died.

  - e.g., The spill caused the level of toxins in the river to rise. Therefore, the entire fish population died.

Semicolon (;)

1. Use a **semicolon** when you want to emphasize the relationship between two sentences. By using a semicolon in this way, you create a single sentence.
   
   e.g., The spill was contained; however, the entire fish population in the river died.

Semicolon (;)

2. Use a **semicolon** to separate items in a list if one or more of the items contains a comma or a conjunction (and, or, but etc.).

- e.g., Yesterday I ate muesli, bacon and eggs for breakfast; bread, cheese and apples for lunch; and fish and chips for tea.

- e.g., Please bring tramping boots; a waterproof jacket and leggings; and a water bottle.

Colon (:) 

1. Use a **colon** when the second sentence provides a further explanation of the first sentence. By using a colon in this way, you create a single sentence.

   e.g., Bellbirds play an important role in forest regeneration: they pollinate native flowers and disperse seeds.
Colon (:) 

2. Use a **colon** after a sentence to introduce a list.

   - e.g., Several features changed significantly during the sampling period: water temperature decreased; ammonium levels increased to more than 150ppm; and the $p$H rose at one stage to 8.3.

Do **not** use a colon when the list is not introduced by a sentence.

   - e.g., The three subspecies of bellbird (Anthornis melanura) are the Three Kings bellbird (A. m. obscura), the Poor Knights bellbird (A. m. oneho) and the bellbird (A. m. melanura).

**Note. You cannot use a comma (,) to replace a full stop, semicolon, or colon. This punctuation error is called a *comma splice.***