An ellipsis (plural: ellipses) is a three-dot punctuation mark used where words have been omitted or where speech has been interrupted. This handout will help you use ellipses correctly.

### General Rules

#### Spacing between Dots
Informally and in print journalism, ellipses are written without spaces. However, in academic writing, the ellipsis is typed with spaces between each dot. There should also be a space before the first dot and after the last dot.

- **Informal:** “Sally saved her money for two years...and now she can afford a new car.”
- **Academic:** “I worked very hard to earn this degree . . . and now I can make more money.”

#### Ellipses after a Complete Sentence
If there is a grammatically complete sentence before an ellipsis, then retain the period, question mark, or exclamation point that would normally conclude the sentence.

- **Example:** “Did you know the UMB Writing Center is located in the SMC Campus Center? . . . It is on the third floor in room 307.”

- **Example:** “There’s a new surgeon. . . . He’s a bit of a snob.”

When the ellipsis follows a complete sentence, the text following the ellipsis should begin with a capital letter.

- **Example:** “Brad and Jen arrived at the Barrister’s Ball well-dressed. . . . They were the best-looking couple of the evening.”

#### Ellipses and Line Breaks
Do not separate the dots of an ellipsis over multiple lines of text. Keep them together at all times.

- **Incorrect:** The credit card stolen in Baltimore was used for a shopping spree three hours later . . . in Arlington, VA.

- **Correct:** The credit card stolen in Baltimore was used for a shopping spree three hours later . . . in Arlington, VA.
Ellipses at the Beginning or End of a Quotation
If you include a quotation in your writing, readers understand that there is probably text before and after the quoted material. Accordingly, there is almost never a need to begin or end a quotation with an ellipsis.

Incorrect: She said that she will make sure “. . . public school funding is a priority . . . ” when she assumes office next month.
Correct: She said that she will make sure “public school funding is a priority” when she assumes office next month.

Ellipses with Other Punctuation
An ellipsis usually precludes the need for a comma, colon, semicolon, or dash.

Incorrect: “Today, after hours of deliberation, the jurors agreed on a verdict.”
Correct: “Today . . . the jurors agreed on a verdict.”

Common Uses
Condensing Quoted Material
When quoting material, be sure to condense your quotes. In other words, be sure to include only those parts that are relevant to your purposes. Use ellipses to omit extraneous material.

Uncondensed: He describes himself as “a country boy deep down. I may live in the city now, but I’ll always be a person who loves the smell of horses more than the shimmer of skyscrapers.”
Condensed: He describes himself as “a country boy . . . who loves the smell of horses more than the shimmer of skyscrapers.”

Indicating Unfinished Thoughts and Interrupted or Faltering Speech
An ellipsis can also indicate that a thought is wandering or trailing off. Usually this is reserved for informal writing.

Example: “Oh, where did I leave my . . . ?”
Example: “I . . . I just don’t know what to do . . . I’m just so unsure.”

References