Wie funktioniert die Zeichensetzung im Englischen?

Hinweis: Zahlreiche VWL-Studierende schreiben ihre Seminar- und Bachelorarbeiten auf Englisch. Dabei fühlen sie sich insbesondere hinsichtlich der Zeichensetzung im Englischen noch unsicher. Das folgende Dokument fasst die wichtigsten Regeln der englischen Zeichensetzung zusammen. Es handelt sich dabei um einen gekürzten Auszug aus dem Buch *Punctuation at Work* von Richard Lauchman (S. 95-155), welches Ihnen als Online-Version über PRIMO zur Verfügung steht.

1 Colon

1.1 Use a colon between two sentences when the second sentence answers the question raised by the first.
e.g. I have one objection to this report: it is far too technical for its intended audience.
e. g. The argument is suspect: it relies more on faith than on actual observation.

1.2 Use a colon before a final clause, phrase, or word that explains, amplifies, or summarizes the preceding expression.
e. g. Honesty, integrity, and industriousness: these are what we value above all.
e. g. Their "definitive" answer can be summarized in one word: maybe.

1.3 When you use a colon to introduce a list, make sure to write a complete thought first.
e. g. Today we will discuss two topics: executive compensation and shareholder rights.
e. g. We have only three options: reduce the bid, increase the scope of work, or abandon the proposal.

1.4 Use a colon to express direct ratio. Note that direct ratio is always expressed in numerals.
e. g. a ratio of approximately 3:2
e. g. 5:4 odds

Attention: No colon should ever follow a verb.
e. g. It's senseless to write something like "We need to track: our indirect costs, our direct costs, and our overhead costs more diligently." Do without the colon.

2 Comma

2.1 Use a comma to separate two words or numbers that the reader might mistakenly connect on the first reading.
e. g. Vigilance, empathy, and judgment are required.
e. g. Of the total, overtime was the greatest single direct cost.
e. g. To his older brother, Carl remained a complete mystery.
e. g. On August 13, 16 civilians were killed by a suicide bomber.

2.2 Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives when (1) the adjectives precede the noun and (2) you could substitute "and" for the comma.
e. g. crisp, vigorous writing
e. g. complex, time-consuming effort

2.3 Omit the comma between cumulative adjectives and between phrases that readers understand to be units.
e.g. seven strange green flying objects (In that construction, flying describes objects, green describes flying objects, strange describes green flying objects, and seven modifies the entire phrase.)
e.g. atomic energy program (atomic and energy are considered to be a unit)

2.4 Use commas to make plain that a word, phrase, or clause is parenthetical (not essential to the intended meaning of the sentence).
e. g. His brother, Leo, won the Nobel Prize in Economics. (He has only one brother.)
e. g. The report, received this morning, is alarming. (We have received only one report.)
e. g. The botanist, much to his astonishment, found himself falling in love with a specimen. ("much to his astonishment" could be cut.)

2.5 Don't use commas around any words that are essential to your meaning.
e. g. His brother Leo won the Nobel Prize in Economics. (He has more than one brother.)
e. g. The report received this morning is alarming. (We have received another report the day before.)

2.6 Use commas to set off contrasting elements. You could also use parentheses or dashes to set off these non-essential phrases.
e. g. The finished document, not the draft, is what matters most.
e. g. What matters most is the finished document, not the draft.

2.7 Use commas to separate items in a list that ends with "and" or "or".
e. g. Complete forms 1099, 5500EZ, and 1806.
e. g. We will be represented by Alice Kirk, Joan Schmidt, or Valerie Wharton.

Attention: If one or more of the items in the list requires internal commas, then use a semicolon to separate them.

2.8 Use a comma when you connect two independent clauses with and, but, or, so, or yet. Put the comma before the conjunction.
e. g. We reviewed the analysis this morning, and Captain Gorday forwarded it to EUCOM.
e. g. I read the report carefully, but the conclusions didn't make sense.
e. g. The work has been completed, so we can invoice the client now.

2.9 Don't use a comma before a conjunction when you have one subject and two verbs.
e.g. Mr. Tubbs flew to the site, and he inspected the damage to the reactor. (BUT: Mr. Tubbs flew to the site and inspected the damage to the reactor.)
e.g. The prosecutor's arguments were eloquent, but they failed to convince the jury. (But: The prosecutor's arguments were eloquent but failed to convince the jury.)

Attention: Break this rule when clarity demands it.
e.g. The congressmen ate, and cursed the lobbyist. (instead of the confusing: The congressmen ate and cursed the lobbyist.)

2.10 Always use a comma when your sentence consists of a dependent clause followed by an independent clause. Put the comma after the dependent clause.
e.g. After we receive the go-ahead, we will begin the final phase of the project.
e.g. If the operation is successful, the patient should fully recover.

2.11 Don't use a comma when your sentence consists of an independent clause followed by a dependent clause.
e.g. We will begin the final phase of the project as soon as we receive the go-ahead.
e.g. The advertising will fail unless we make it simpler.

2.12 Use a comma when your sentence begins with a phrase modifying the subject.
e.g. Howling at the moon, the wolves epitomized the wilderness.

2.13 You can omit the comma after an opening word or phrase when clarity does not require it.
e.g. Accordingly we find that the company has acted in good faith.
e.g. Next year they will introduce a 2-inch, high-definition disc.
e.g. In fact we clearly stated that the deadline had been changed.

2.14 Don't use a comma when you begin a sentence with a short phrase and the next word is a verb.
e.g. On the desk lay the half-finished report.
e.g. At the rear of Level 3 is the elevator.

2.15 When your sentence begins with a short indication of time, use judgment.
In the examples below, putting a comma after 1989 and June would not be wrong, but because a comma would not improve clarity here, all it would do is slow things down.
e.g. In 1989 the Cold War ended.
e.g. By June we expect to finish the project.

Attention: Use a comma when your sentence begins with an indication of time and the next word is capitalized to avoid confusion.
e.g. By April, Smith was nearly done.
e.g. On May 30, ATMs malfunctioned at several hundred locations.

2.16 When you state a precise date (month, day, and year), always use a comma to separate day and year. Also, use a comma after the date when you indicate both month and day.
e.g. On July 6, 2009, she received the news.
e.g. On February 29, the protesters were arrested.

3 Dash

3.1 Use dashes (instead of commas or parentheses) when you wish to emphasize parenthetical material.
e. g. The new product—which took four years to complete—will be test-marketed in Charlotte next month. (strong emphasis)
If you use commas instead, you have no particular emphasis (The new product, which took four years to complete, will be test-marketed in Charlotte next month.). If you use parentheses, you have a weak emphasis (The new product (which took four years to complete) will be test-marketed in Charlotte next month.).

3.2 Always use dashes around a parenthetical expression that strongly interrupts the flow of thought.
e.g. If you choose to appeal—the decision is up to you—you must notify us within 30 days.
e.g. We still have not heard from them—their response was due yesterday— regarding how they intend to resolve the dispute.

3.3 Use dashes instead of commas whenever necessary to prevent misreading.
e.g. In the writing we do at work, we should strive to be clear—to convey the meaning we intend—and we want the reader to understand the sentence the first time he reads it.
Note than with commas, the sentence looks at first like a list: In the writing we do at work, we should strive to be clear, to convey the meaning we intend, and we want the reader to understand the sentence the first time he reads it.

3.4 You can use a dash (instead of a colon) to introduce a summary statement when you want to strongly emphasize the concluding thought.
e. g. He remarked that there is only one important fact about humanity—at heart, people are and will remain superstitious savages.
e. g. The project manager came right to the point—productivity must improve.

3.5 You can use a dash (instead of a comma) before a coordinating conjunction between two sentences when you want to strongly emphasize the concluding thought.
e. g. The policy was perfectly adequate when it was written—but that was 25 years ago, and the realities of the workplace have changed.

4 Semicolon

4.1 A semicolon may be used to connect independent clauses when there is no conjunction between them.
e. g. Meriwether invented the device; Slovo received the patent.
e. g. Fannie Mae stock lost 8 percent last year; Freddie Mac stock gained 6 percent.

4.2 A semicolon may be used to connect two independent clauses when the second independent clause is introduced by a transitional phrase.
e. g. A new CEO will be hired next year; in the interim, Smith will serve as chief executive.
e. g. The chain of custody was tainted; as a result, the judge threw out the evidence.

Attention: Note that a comma always follows the transitional word or phrase.

4.3 A semicolon may be used to connect two independent clauses when the second independent clause is introduced by a "conjunctive adverb", e. g. accordingly, consequently, furthermore, hence, however, indeed, moreover, nevertheless, nonetheless, otherwise, still, therefore, and thus.
e. g. The method must be repeatable; otherwise, the results will be considered invalid.
e. g. Our competitors are gaining market share; furthermore, they are expanding overseas.

Attention: Please note that a comma always follows these words when you use them as conjunctions.

4.4 Use a semicolon when you are listing ideas that are (1) closely related and (2) slightly complex.
e. g. Attacks by animals that are usually peaceful have been spreading throughout Washington, D.C. A pigeon assaulted a police officer in Georgetown; deer kicked out the windshields and side windows of several parked cars in McLean Gardens; a flock of seagulls pecked at the head and neck of a jogger near the Kennedy Center.

4.5 A semicolon may be used to separate items in a list when one or more of those items requires a comma of its own.
e. g. Members of the panel include Frank Danziger, CEO of Fairborn; Lindsay Venstrom, President of Arquebus; Ray Grant, Deputy Director of the Department of Justice; and Zoe Kirchner, Professor of Ethics at Yale University.

Literatur: Weitere Informationen zur Zeichensetzung entnehmen Sie bitte Lauchman, Richard (2010): *Punctuation at Work*, American Management Association, New York.