

## **PSY 415: DYNAMICS OF THE COUNSELING RELATIONSHIP**

MW 1:30-2:50; Hopkins 302

**Instructor:**

Ian MacFarlane, Ph.D.

Hopkins 307; 903-813-2347

[imacfarlane@austincollege.edu](mailto:imacfarlane@austincollege.edu) (best way to contact me)

**Office Hours:**

Tuesdays 9:30-10:30, 3-4; Fridays 11-12; or by appointment

**Course Description:**

This course is an advanced seminar on the delivery of mental health services (i.e., psychotherapy, counseling). Research on psychotherapy processes and outcomes has repeatedly shown the relationship between therapist and client to be the strongest predictor of therapeutic success. Thus, this capstone course focuses on the numerous factors which influence this critical relationship. Additionally, this course serves as a transition between undergraduate and graduate studies in terms of content and student responsibilities. To this end, you will be reading numerous sources and synthesizing a range of material to begin developing clinical judgment about how your actions as a mental health service provider affect your clients. While we will occasionally discuss treatment modalities such as group and couples therapy, the primary emphasis will be individual therapy with adults.

The first segment of the course will focus on therapeutic microskills, the basic skills of interacting with clients. This section of the course will include skill development via simulated counseling session role plays. The second segment of the course will focus on professional development of therapists, with an emphasis on novice practitioners, to help you understand what to expect if you decide to pursue a career as a mental health practitioner. The third segment of the class will focus on the therapeutic relationship, specifically the dynamics between therapist and client. The last segment of the class will focus on controversial issues in the field.

The format of this course is primarily discussion based. Most class sessions will focus on discussion of the readings assigned for that day, and may include an introductory lecture component. Thus it is imperative that you come to class having processed in the information in the readings. Notice the word “processed,” which is more than simply reading. Moving your eyes over the pages will not prepare you sufficiently for the discussions we will have in this course. You must reflect on what you read, critique the material, and be prepared to discuss the issues from multiple perspectives. Students will take primary responsibility for leading discussions throughout the semester, both in teams and individually.

The course is designed to help students reach the following learning objectives:

- Critique and synthesize peer-reviewed journal articles on a variety of topics related to the provision of mental health services.
- Develop preliminary competencies in basic therapeutic microskills.
- Facilitate discussions of scholarly material with peers.
- Understand professional development trends among mental health practitioners.
- Critically analyze the microskills performed in a therapy session.
- Establish a preliminary plan for self-care and burnout prevention.
- Refine oral presentation skills.

**Required Materials:**

- Cavanagh M. E., & Levitov, J. E. (2002). *The counseling experience: A theoretical and practical approach* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Skovholt, T. M., & Trotter-Mathison M. (2010). *The resilient practitioner: Burnout prevention and self-care strategies for counselors, therapists, teachers, and health professionals* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Yalom, I. (2002) *The gift of therapy: An open letter to a new generation of therapists and their patients*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

You may purchase either the books or the electronic versions, whichever you prefer. Additional readings will be posted via Moodle.

**Assignments:***Discussion Participation (50 points)*

Active discussion participation is critical for both you and your classmates to get the most out of this course. I assume you will all be excited about and interested in the topics we will cover, so you will start out with full credit. Unexcused absences and not making meaningful contributions will result in deductions from this total (2 points and 1 point, respectively). While these may seem like small penalties, they add up quickly.

*Yalom Discussion Leadership (25 points)*

Throughout the semester we will be discussing Irv Yalom's book, *The Gift of Therapy*, which is a series of short essays in which he provides advice to new therapists. Yalom is an influential name in the psychotherapy literature, and his advice is interesting, based on years of experience, and at times controversial. Each student will lead a 20-30 minute discussion on a section of the book. You are responsible for coming up with questions based on the chapters assigned. Questions can be based on specific points in one of the essays or themes across the section you are assigned. Our Yalom discussions will take place on Mondays, and **you are responsible for emailing your questions to the class by 11:59pm Saturday night**. You must write a minimum of 5 questions. We will likely not have time to answer all questions, so make sure to put them in the order you want to talk about them.

*Group Discussion Leadership (40 points)*

During the controversial issues portion of the class, student teams will lead the discussion on the assigned articles for the entire class period. You are responsible for coming up with questions based on the readings assigned. Questions can be based on specific points in article or themes across the readings assigned. **You are responsible for emailing your questions to the class at least 48 hours before the discussion**. You must write a minimum of 7 questions. We will likely not have time to answer all questions, so make sure to put them in the order you want to talk about them.

*Interview with a Therapist Paper (35 points)*

For this paper you will be paired with a therapist who has volunteered to be interviewed for this course. You will be given a list of questions which must be asked, but will also develop additional questions based on your personal interests in the field (which must be approved by me before the interview). The interview will be conducted over the phone or via Skype, so you will need to take good notes during the conversation. If you would like to record the interview this is fine as long as the therapist gives you permission first. You will summarize the therapist's responses and your reactions to them in a paper no longer than 10 pages.

*Therapy Analysis Paper (45 points)*

We will cover the basic microskills all therapists use during the first segment of this class. You will have the opportunity to observe a simulated therapy session and critique the therapist's use of these microskills in a paper of no more than 10 pages. You will also assess the impact of these microskills on the client and discuss how you think they will affect the client's relationship with the therapist moving forward.

*Self-Care Paper (45 points)*

One of the major topics of this course will be the emotional health of the therapist. Novice practitioners sometimes struggle to separate work and home life or fail to take care of themselves as they try to help their clients. We will discuss some of what makes psychotherapy a potentially draining experience and how to promote a healthy approach to this career path. In this paper of no more than 10 pages, you will reflect on which struggles of novice practitioners you would expect to be the most challenging for you and identify the resources in your life you already have and would like to develop.

*Cultural Groups Presentation (50 points)*

As we will discuss in class, culture (broadly defined) plays a large role in the success of therapy. There are entire courses in graduate school devoted to cross-cultural or culture-specific therapy, but the purpose of this assignment is to begin to familiarize yourself with what literature supported recommendations for therapy with certain cultural groups. Students will work in groups of 2-3 and select one cultural group on which to present. You will conduct a literature review on the selected population and summarize the recommendations and rationales for the class during the final exam period. Presentations will be 20 minutes for groups of 2 and 30 minutes for groups of 3.

**Total Points:**

|                                  |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Individual Discussion Leadership | 25         |
| Group Discussion Leadership      | 40         |
| Discussion Participation         | 50         |
| Interview with a Therapist Paper | 35         |
| Therapy Analysis Paper           | 50         |
| Self-Care Paper                  | 50         |
| Final Presentation               | 50         |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>300</b> |

**Grading:**

For this class all assignments will be graded blind. During the first week of class you will choose a 5 digit number which will serve as your identifier on all assignments instead of your name.

Grades will be assigned on a scale no more stringent than the following percentages:

| <b>Letter</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>Points</b> | <b>Letter</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>Points</b> |
|---------------|----------|---------------|---------------|----------|---------------|
| <b>A</b>      | > 93%    | > 279         | <b>C</b>      | 73%      | 219           |
| <b>A-</b>     | 90%      | 270           | <b>C-</b>     | 70%      | 210           |
| <b>B+</b>     | 87%      | 261           | <b>D+</b>     | 67%      | 201           |
| <b>B</b>      | 83%      | 249           | <b>D</b>      | 63%      | 189           |
| <b>B-</b>     | 80%      | 240           | <b>D-</b>     | 60%      | 180           |
| <b>C+</b>     | 77%      | 231           | <b>F</b>      | < 60%    | < 180         |

**Tentative Course Schedule:**

| Date           | Class Topic                    |                            | Readings/Assignments                                                                                           |
|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Week 1</b>  |                                |                            |                                                                                                                |
| 2/3            | M                              | What is Therapy?           | C&L 1                                                                                                          |
| 2/5            | W                              | Ethics in Psychotherapy    | C&L 3; APA Ethics Code; Pomerantz & Handelsman, 2004                                                           |
| <b>Week 2</b>  |                                |                            |                                                                                                                |
| 2/10           | M                              | Asking Questions           | C&L 6; Hill et al., 2007                                                                                       |
| 2/12           | W                              | Primary Empathy            | C&L 10                                                                                                         |
| <b>Week 3</b>  |                                |                            |                                                                                                                |
| 2/17           | M                              | Advanced Empathy           | Elson, 2001; Hill et al., 2003; Ladany et al., 2004                                                            |
| 2/19           | W                              | Power of Silence           |                                                                                                                |
| <b>Week 4</b>  |                                |                            |                                                                                                                |
| 2/24           | M                              | Confrontation              | Y 1-13; Leaman, 1978; <b>Interview Paper Due</b>                                                               |
| 2/26           | W                              | Self-Disclosure            | Audet, 2011; Bottrill et al., 2010; Gibson, 2012; McCarthy Veach, 2011; Ziv-Beiman, 2013                       |
| <b>Week 5</b>  |                                |                            |                                                                                                                |
| 3/3            | M                              | Why People Come to Therapy | Y 14-24; C&L 7, 8                                                                                              |
| 3/5            | W                              | Therapy Demonstration      |                                                                                                                |
| <b>Week 6</b>  |                                |                            |                                                                                                                |
| 3/10-14        | <i>No Class – Spring Break</i> |                            |                                                                                                                |
| <b>Week 7</b>  |                                |                            |                                                                                                                |
| 3/17           | M                              | Cycle of Caring            | Y 25-32; S&TM 1-3; <b>Therapy Analysis Paper Due</b>                                                           |
| 3/19           | W                              | Professional Development   | S&TM 4; Goodyear et al., 2003; Grant & Schofield, 2007; Healey & Hays, 2011; Woodside et al., 2007             |
| <b>Week 8</b>  |                                |                            |                                                                                                                |
| 3/24           | M                              | Novice Practitioners       | Y 33-40; S&TM 5; C&L 5; Fontaine & Hammond, 1994; Schwing et al., 2011                                         |
| 3/26           | W                              | Burnout                    | S&TM 6, 7                                                                                                      |
| <b>Week 9</b>  |                                |                            |                                                                                                                |
| 3/31           | M                              | Self-Care                  | Y 41-46; S&TM 8-10                                                                                             |
| 4/2            | W                              | Stages of Counseling       | C&L 2; Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977                                                                   |
| <b>Week 10</b> |                                |                            |                                                                                                                |
| 4/7            | M                              | Working Alliance           | Y 47-51; C&L 12; Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2001; Bachelor, 2013; Castonguay et al., 2006; Nissen-Lie et al., 2010 |

| <b>Date</b>    |   | <b>Class Topic</b>                | <b>Readings/Assignments</b>                                                                                                                           |
|----------------|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>4/9</b>     | W | Transference/Countertransference  | Marmarosh, 2012; Myers & Hayes, 2006; Yeh & Hayes, 2011                                                                                               |
| <b>Week 11</b> |   |                                   |                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>4/14</b>    | M | Resistance                        | Y 52-62; C&L 11; Beutler et al., 2002; Engle & Arkowitz, 2008; Moyers & Rollnick, 2002; <b>Self-Care Paper Due</b>                                    |
| <b>4/16</b>    | W | Cross-Cultural Counseling         | Cardemil & Battle, 2003; Knox et al., 2003; La Roche & Maxie, 2003; Maxie et al., 2006; McIntosh, 1988; Sue et al., 2007                              |
| <b>Week 12</b> |   |                                   |                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>4/21</b>    | M | Cultural Competence               | Y 63-74; Sue & Sue, 2003; Ridley, 2005                                                                                                                |
| <b>4/23</b>    | W | Reparative Therapy                | APA, 1998; Bright, 2004; Lasser & Gottlieb, 2004; Miville & Ferguson, 2004; Nicolosi et al., 2000; Spitzer, 2003; Spitzer, 2012; Tozer & Hayes, 2004; |
| <b>Week 13</b> |   |                                   |                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>4/28</b>    | M | Impact of Managed Care            | Y 75-85; Bruan & Cox, 2005; Cohen et al., 2006; Rupert & Baird, 2004                                                                                  |
| <b>4/30</b>    | W | Telepsychology                    | Campos, 2009; Glueckauf, et al., 2003; Joint Task Force, 2013; Ohio Psychological Association, 2010; Zur, 2012                                        |
| <b>Week 14</b> |   |                                   |                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>5/5</b>     | M | EVT, EST, & EBT                   | Chambless & Hollon, 1998; Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002; Kazdin, 2008; Peterson, 2006; Wampold, 2001                                                         |
| <b>5/7</b>     | W | Wrap Up                           |                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>5/16</b>    | F | <b>Final Presentations (12-2)</b> |                                                                                                                                                       |

### Technology

This course will be web-enhanced through the use of Moodle. Readings, lecture slides, some handouts, and links to other resources will be provided through this system. Unless otherwise specified, you will turn your assignments in via Moodle. You can access Moodle through the following link: <https://moodle.austincollege.edu/login/index.php>. Questions concerning content/postings should be directed to the instructor, while questions regarding access/technical issues should be directed to the Austin College IT Help Desk (903-813-2063; [helpdesk@austincollege.edu](mailto:helpdesk@austincollege.edu)). A PDF viewer is required to view the content posted to the Moodle site. Free Adobe software is available for download via <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>.

**Policies:***Academic Integrity*

Scholastic misconduct is broadly defined as any act that violates the rights of another student in academic work or that involves misrepresentation of your own work. Scholastic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to): cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing, which means misrepresenting as you own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper, or substantially similar papers, to meet the requirements of more than one course without the approval and consent of all instructors concerned (including papers you have submitted in previous semesters); providing others with copies of your assignments; depriving another student of necessary course materials; or interfering with another student's work.

Plagiarism is a serious offense which will not be tolerated. Most of the time, however, plagiarism happens because students are rushing through assignments and do not leave themselves with sufficient time to properly attribute information taken from other sources. For this class you must cite your sources using APA style. If you plan to be a psychology major or minor, I encourage you to get used to APA style, as you will be using this throughout your coursework. Note that for either style, you need to include citations each time you use information from a source. It is incorrect to use information throughout a paragraph and only include a citation at the end. Also, if you use 5 or more consecutive words from a source, you must include quotation marks and include the page number (or paragraph number if you are using an online source) in your citation.

You will be required to submit an electronic copy of all major assignments which will be compared with the TurnItIn database. Penalties for scholastic misconduct in any portion of the academic work for a course shall be made at the discretion of the instructor and may range from point deductions on the assignment to failing the class. All academic misconduct (no matter how small) will be reported to the Academic Integrity Council, which may impose sanctions up to and including expulsion. Austin College's full academic integrity policy is available in the *Environment* (Austin College Student Handbook; the most recent edition is posted on Moodle) in the Student Conduct section. If you have any questions about whether something is plagiarism or not, please talk with me about it BEFORE you turn in an assignment.

*Accommodations*

Austin College seeks to provide reasonable accommodations for all individuals with disabilities and will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines. If you have a documented disability for which you would like accommodations, please inform me by the second week of class. It is your responsibility to remind me of your accommodations at least a week before I distribute each assignment or exam. To arrange for accommodations, you will need to register as soon as possible at the Academic Skills Center with Laura Márquez, the Director of the Academic Skills Center, (903-813-2454, Suite 211 of the Wright Campus Center). For information on this process, go to <http://www.austincollege.edu/campus-life/academic-skills-center/>. This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request.

*Attendance*

Attendance is required and critically important to your success in this class. Students who miss more than three classes without documentation may be dropped from the course at the instructor's discretion. If you know you are going to miss class for a medical, religious, or Austin College sanctioned academic/athletic reason, let me know in advance and potential alternative

assignments may be given at the discretion of the instructor. PowerPoint slides will be posted to the Moodle site, but will be outlines which require additional information from lectures or activities. If you miss class it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate. Full lecture slides will not be distributed. If you must arrive late or leave early, please sit near the door and do so in the least disruptive manner possible.

### *Changes to the Syllabus*

All aspects of this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Students will be informed in writing of any changes to the syllabus.

### *Communication*

Outside of class, I will communicate with you most frequently via your *Austin College email address*. **It is your responsibility to monitor this address and you are responsible for the information delivered to this address.** I highly recommend you check your email at least daily. I will also post messages to Moodle, so you are encouraged to check Moodle regularly. The best way to contact me is through email. I will always attempt to respond to email promptly, which means within 24 hours. **I typically do not check my email after 8pm**, so if you email me at night, do not expect a response until the next morning. I check Moodle daily and will respond to questions posted in the forum within 24 hours.

### *Extra Credit*

Extra credit opportunities may be given at the discretion of the instructor. Possible examples of extra credit opportunities include: participation in psychological research, attendance at events, or further research into a topic of interest. The maximum amount of extra credit possible for this class is 3 points (~1% of your final grade).

- Students can earn extra credit points by participating in research authorized by the psychology department. All students will be added to the email list to receive notifications of research opportunities for extra credit. If you do not want to receive these emails, you will be given the opportunity to opt out. For every 30 minutes of research participation, students will receive 0.5 points of extra credit.
- Alternative extra credit assignments may arise during the semester as opportunities to attend campus or community events become available. The amount of points received for attending such events will vary by the time commitment (the points will be posted along with the information about the event). The length of the response paper required will also vary, but will be a minimum of 2 pages.
  - Event Attendance Response Paper Requirements:
    - Describe the event (e.g., where, when, why)
    - Who was the target audience?
    - What did you learn?
    - How does this relate to something we have discussed in class or some other aspect of psychology?
    - If you had been in charge of the event, what would you do plan next as a follow-up? How might the event coordinators continue to build momentum, conduct additional research, etc.
- Students can also write a 3 page paper on an approved psychology topic for 1 point of extra credit. These papers must be proposed by 4/7 and turned in by 4/21.

*Incompletes*

An “incomplete” only may be given as a grade for the course when a student has a **passing grade the course** and has an unforeseen and uncontrollable event occur that prevents him or her from earning a significant number of points in the course. Thus, incompletes are rarely given and each situation will be considered on a case-by-case basis. To have an incomplete changed to a different grade all missing work must be completed by the end of the following term.

*Late Work*

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date listed in the syllabus. Assignments turned in after class but on the same day will be penalized 5%, with 10% additional penalty for every additional calendar day the assignment is late (thus if the assignment is due on Tuesday but turned in on Thursday the maximum score you could receive is 75%). No assignments will be accepted more than 7 days after the original due date. Extensions may be given at the discretion of the instructor, but **no extensions will be given during the 24 hours before an assignment is due**. It is your responsibility to budget your time so you are not working on assignments at the last minute. Specific arrangements must be made with the instructor as to how late work will be turned in (e.g., email vs. hard copy) or it will not be accepted.

*Make-Up Exams*

If circumstances prevent you from being in class on the day of an exam, please notify me as soon as you can (BEFORE the exam) in order to arrange to complete a make-up exam. Make-up exams will be scheduled prior to the exam date if possible. Please note **I will require documentation** (e.g., a doctor’s note) explaining your absence from class in nearly all cases. Make-up exams may be different than the original exam and **must be completed within 1 week of the original exam date**.

*Role of Instructor*

I will provide learning opportunities designed to provide students with information about psychology and foster critical thinking. Every effort will be made to accommodate different learning styles and students will be encouraged to provide feedback both formally and informally. I pledge to carefully consider constructive feedback about teaching methods and incorporate suggestions to the extent feasible. I am responsible for treating students in a respectful, professional manner and creating a classroom atmosphere where students treat each other as such. I will be accessible outside of class and encourages you to meet with me either during office hours or individual appointments to discuss concerns (e.g., about the class, workload, assignments, etc.), conflicts or problems that affect course performance, concepts which need further clarification, additional resources related to course material, or careers in psychology.

*Role of Student*

Students will come to class prepared to learn and open to new ideas. Assignments (including readings) will be completed before class begins and to the best of each student’s ability. Classroom discussions will be conducted in a respectful manner, where all opinions are valued regardless of whether you agree or disagree with the content. Students who cannot maintain respectful communication will be asked to leave the classroom. Students will take responsibility for their own learning throughout the class. Students will consult available resources (e.g., the syllabus, Moodle, email messages) before asking administrative questions.

*Statement on Classroom Conduct*

All students have the right to a civil, productive, and stimulating learning environment. In turn, instructors have a responsibility to nurture and maintain such an environment. Lively, even heated, discussion is not disruptive behavior. Both instructors and students have a fundamental obligation to respect the rights of each other and an equally fundamental obligation to respect the instructional setting as a place for civil, courteous behavior.

*Statement on Diversity*

We will all bring unique perspectives to this course and I hope those who feel comfortable will share insights and alternative interpretations throughout the semester. Cultural perspectives will be explicitly included in many of our discussions and will likely come up in many others. I welcome feedback on ways to increase the diversity of perspectives being provided in class and methods for creating a more inclusive atmosphere through my teaching.

**Writing Tips**

Your ability to write will greatly impact your grades in this course. I expect you to make strides in your writing in terms of mechanics, style, and ability to write concisely. Writing skills make up a substantial portion of your grade on written materials, so make sure to take this seriously.

*Professionalism*

- Assignments must be printed in black ink on white paper. Pages must be clean (i.e., no coffee rings, dog drool, rips, etc.).
- Your name, the date, and the assignment title must be included on the first page.
- Pages must be numbered (if assignment is more than 1 page) and all pages must be stapled together. I do not read anything that is not attached to the first page and your grade on the assignment will reflect this.
- Proof read your papers. Writing is about communicating to the reader so you need to make sure you are getting your point across. If you typically have issues with grammar and/or spelling, make sure you have your papers done early enough to have someone proof them for you. The Academic Skills Center has writing tutors available and I strongly encourage you to make use of them.

*Use of Quotes*

- Quotes should be included very infrequently. You should not use more than 2 quotes in any paper you write for me. Most of your papers will likely not contain any quotes. This is both an APA style issue and a pedagogical issue. I want to see that you can paraphrase and explain what happened in your own words.
- If you do use quotes, you still have to explain what the authors are saying.
- Remember, if you use 5 or more consecutive words from another source, you must use quotation marks and include the page number (or paragraph number if it is an online source) in your citation.

*APA Style tips*

- The *Publication Manual* has more in it than just how to cite sources!
- The goal of scientific writing is to be concise and precise. You will not get bonus points for inserting “fluff” into your papers. In fact, your grades will suffer if you are including a bunch of filler instead of substance.
- Avoid sexist language. Do not refer to people generally or groups of mixed genders as masculine. You do not have to write “his or her” every time either. You can switch

between he and she as long as they are approximately balanced throughout the paper as a whole. As a side note, many people identify outside the dichotomy of male and female, so genderless pronouns such as “zhe” or “hir” are likely to be more common in the future. These pronouns are not in common usage yet, so check with other professors to see if they accept them, but in my classes these are acceptable.

- For longer papers (>3-4 pages) it is often helpful to include headings and subheadings to organize your writing.

#### *Additional tips*

- Never, ever use the word “prove” in your writing. Research studies do NOT prove anything. Research can support, suggest, indicate, demonstrate, corroborate, show, etc.
- The writing assignments you do for me are considered formal writing. Therefore, there should not be any contractions (e.g., you’re, can’t, don’t) in your papers. The exception is when I ask you to write reflection papers. These are less formal and may include contractions.
- I am not impressed by your vocabulary. I am impressed by your ability to communicate clearly. Do not use big words if you do not know what they mean.
- Know your target audience. Avoid jargon unless you are sure the entire audience will know what it means. Unless otherwise told, assume the target audience is me.
- If you are critiquing a research article, you need to be able to articulate why the issue you are pointing out is important. Do not just say they needed a bigger sample. What would be gained with a bigger sample? How does the sample limit interpretation of results?

#### *Common Writing Mistakes*

- The word “that” is the most overused word in the English language, and is often included in sentences unnecessarily. When you come to a sentence which includes “that” while proofreading your paper, read the sentence again without “that.” You will often find it still makes sense. If so, remove the unnecessary “that.” Here is a non-exhaustive list of words commonly followed by “that” which typically do not need to be: state, say, mention, believe, feel, think, agree, found, indicate, conclude, imply, and realize.
- Do not start a sentence with the word “however.” In this context the word does not mean what you intend it to mean. At the start of a sentence, “however” means “in whatever manner,” not “nevertheless.” This is true even when there is a comma after the “however.” This can always be fixed by simply moving the “however” a few words into the sentence or using “nevertheless” to start the sentence. For example, “However, the research does not support this idea” becomes “The research, however, does not support this idea.”
- Periods and commas always belong inside quotation marks. Do not put the period after the quotation mark.
- Be aware of the verb tense you are using. Students often shift tenses back and forth throughout papers, paragraphs, and even sentences. Some tense shifts are appropriate, but many times are due to sloppy editing. Make sure you are consistent and intentional with your tenses.
- Do not use “they” when you are referring to a single person. This is usually done in an effort to avoid choosing he versus she (see above).
- The word “pique” means interesting or stimulating. The word “peak” means comes to a point or summit. The word “peek” means a brief look. Attention is “piqued” not “peaked.”