

PROPER USE OF COMMAS, PERIODS, AND QUOTATION MARKS

By Professor Lawrence Raab, Williams College Department of English

The most common grammatical error in your papers is misplacing commas and periods outside of quotation marks.

Periods go inside quotation marks, as in

Robert Frost is the author of “Design.”

Commas go inside quotation marks, as in

Robert Frost is the author of “Design,” as well as many other poems.

Question marks go outside quotation marks (unless, of course, they are part of the quotation). As in

Is Robert Frost the author of “Design”?

Here are incorrect uses:

Frost describes the spider as “dimpled”, “fat”, and “white”.

This should be

Frost describes the spider as “dimpled,” “fat,” and “white.”