

### Handout 3 – Syntax and Style

1. Every field has its conventions and notational quirks. Syntacticians use a number of typographical conventions. You are expected to use these on all homeworks, in-class exercises, quizzes, and tests. I will use them in my handouts and lectures, as well.
2. Here are some typographical conventions:
  - a. *Italicized text, like this* is used for bits of actual language data.
  - b. **Bolded text, like this** is used for important terminology.
  - c. An asterisk (\*) is placed before ungrammatical sentences – those sentences judged as illformed or structurally unintelligible by a real native speaker.  
*\*The birds a beautiful song singing were*
  - d. A question mark (?) is for sentences that are weird for some native speakers, but not quite ungrammatical.  
*?He's the guy that when I called him he hung up.*
  - e. A hash mark (#) is used for sentences that are pragmatically inappropriate in context, but not structurally ungrammatical out of context.  
*Who went to the store?*  
# --*To Target*
3. Some standard ideas behind the study of language:
  - a. Written language is not part of natural language – everyone knows a language, but not everyone knows how to read and write. Many languages have no writing system at all. Therefore, written conventions are outside the purview of our theories.
  - b. This includes spelling and punctuation rules.
  - c. Civility is expected at all times. Labels like “slang,” “degraded speech,” “incorrect grammar,” and so forth, are prejudiced and unscientific and have no place a linguistics class.
  - d. We are all competent speakers of at least one language. No two class members will have exactly the same idiolect. Variation is a natural and important part of language, so there will be disagreements about grammaticality judgments. These disagreements can lead to interesting questions about the structure of different grammars of English.
4. Some general points
  - a. Most examples and problem sets will involve English. The principles and methodology we discuss, however, will be applicable to other languages. From time to time, we will address data from languages that are not English. If your native language provides support OR counterevidence for a principle we discuss, do not hesitate to speak up. The more data, the better the theory!
  - b. Dissenting ideas and opinions are always welcome. Don't be afraid to express them!