**Markdown Workshop**

**Computers & Writing 2016**

Markdown is a fantastic writing technology built out of plain text that lets writers create formatted text in an easy-to-read format. Further, it supports document structure, so that headings can be marked as such, as well as lists, blockquotes, and other elements. Lastly, Markdown documents can be easily converted into a number of other file formats: PDF, HTML, DOCX, etc.

More specifically, Markdown is a markup syntax. It was created by John Gruber, who described his goals in this way:

[It should be] as readable as possible. The idea is that a Markdown-formatted document should be publishable as-is, as plain text, without looking like it’s been marked up with tags or formatting instructions. While Markdown’s syntax has been influenced by several existing text-to-HTML filters, the single biggest source of inspiration for Markdown’s syntax is the format of plain text email. ([Gruber, 2004](http://daringfireball.net/projects/markdown/))

**Key benefits**

* *Plain text file formats*: Twenty years from now, when this Word file is unreadable, any computer will be able to read a Markdown file. Additionally, plain text files can be read by a number of programs without any degradation: no varying fonts and margins between applications.
* *Multi-platform support*: While writers can use the Markdown syntax in any application that produces text, there are many applications dedicated to supporting Markdown explicitly. These applications exist on [Windows](http://www.texts.io/features/), [Mac](http://multimarkdown.com/), [Linux](http://www.mdcharm.com/), [iOS](http://omz-software.com/editorial/), and [Android](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=net.ia.iawriter&hl=en). Again, because the file formats are plain text, files can be shuttled between these various platforms with no loss or issues.
* *Write once, distribute anywhere*: Markdown documents can be converted to a variety of formats. Write a syllabus using the Markdown syntax, then produce a PDF, an HTML page (for uploading to a website or pasting into a CMS text area), a Word file, and a slideshow, all from the same source document. This system can also support templates and boilerplate easily.