

Plaz's Comma Rules

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Introduction

- The comma is a valuable, useful punctuation device because it separates the structural elements of sentences into manageable segments.
- "comma" comes directly from the Greek *komma*, which means "something cut off" or "a short clause".
- The rules provided here are those found in traditional handbooks; however, in certain rhetorical contexts and for specific purposes, these rules may be broken.



Before Coordinating Conjunctions for Compound Sentences

- Use comma before an coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*)
- Used to connect two independent clauses in a compound sentence
- Ex: Joe has seven chickens, **but** Jack has three.
- Ex: I asked you to repeat that, **yet** you didn't.

Set off an Introductory Phrase or Clause

- Introductory clauses are dependent clauses that provide background information or "set the stage" for the main part of the sentence, the independent clause. For example:
- *If they want to win*, athletes must exercise every day.
(introductory dependent clause, main clause)
- *Because he kept barking insistently*, we threw the ball for Smokey. (introductory dependent clause, main clause)
- **Clue:** Introductory clauses start with adverbs like *after*, *although*, *as*, *because*, *before*, *if*, *since*, *though*, *until*, *when*, etc.
- (We call this a complex sentence)

Important Exception

- Ex: Because she fell, she was late to class.
- Don't put a comma when the dependent clause comes after the independent clause
- ~~Ex: She was late for class, because she fell.~~
- Instead: She was late for class because she fell.

Transition/Introductory Words and Phrases

- Use a comma to set off transition words from the rest of the sentence
- Common introductory phrases that should be followed by a comma include participial and infinitive phrases, absolute phrases, nonessential appositive phrases, and long prepositional phrases (over four words).
- Ex: Unfortunately, there is no free lunch
- Ex: I don't want to take the test, however, I need to.

Set off an Appositives and Parenthetical Phrases

- An appositive is a noun or pronoun -- often with modifiers -- set beside another noun or pronoun to explain or identify it.
- Parenthetical = (like Parentheses)
- Only put commas before and after appositives when the sentence would make still sense without the appositive (non-restrictive)
- Ex: Bill, my brother, got a job.

Don't use a comma

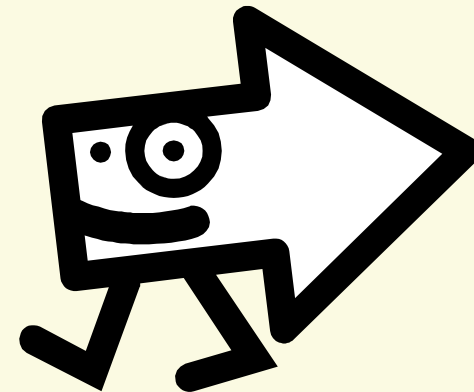
- after a brief prepositional phrase. (Less than five words)
- after a restrictive (essential) appositive phrase.
- to separate the subject from the predicate.

- Ex: Preparing and submitting his report to the committee for evaluation and possible publication [x] was one of the most difficult tasks Bill had ever attempted.
- To start a new business without doing market research and long-term planning in advance [x] would be foolish.
- Extracting the most profit for the least expenditure on labor and materials [x] is the primary goal of a capitalist.



Review

- Before Coordinating Conjunctions for Compound Sentences
- Set off an Introductory Phrase or Clause
- Transition/Introductory Words and Phrases
- Set off an Appositives and Parenthetical Phrases
- Ready, lets continue...



Separate Adjectives

- Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives that describe the same noun
- (coordinating adjectives) describe the same noun equally (Does it make sense to put in an **and**?)
- Ex: I will go into the small, cramped room.
- Not: The powerful [x] summer sun beat down upon them.

Quoted Words and Dialogue

- Use a comma to set off quoted words and dialogue
- Before the quote
 - Ex: I said, “go to the mall.”
- After the quote
 - Ex: “Go to the mall,” I said.



Direct Address

- Use a comma to set off the noun you are directly talking to.
- Ex: Mom, go get me a soda.

Phrases that Express Contrast

- Use a comma to set off phrases that express contrast or a distinct pause or shift
- Ex: You need to pay attention now, not later.
- Ex: The game is today, not tomorrow.



Mild Interjections

- Use a comma to set off mild interjections!
- Ex: Oh, it will freeze.
- Ex: My gosh, that's smart.

More Comma Abuse

- Don't use a comma to separate a subject from the verb
 - An ant, is the smallest bug.
- Don't put a comma between 2 verbs in a compound predicate
 - We put on our music, and began to study.
- Don't put a comma between 2 nouns (or noun phrases) in a compound subject
 - The music teacher, and the football coach are married



Review 2

- Separate Adjectives
- Quoted Words and Dialogue
- Direct Address
- Phrases that Express Contrast
- Mild Interjections
- And now the obvious (easy) ones...

Separate Items in a Series or List

- Use commas to separate items of three or more things
- The last comma is sometimes left out (serial comma)
- Ex: Milk, bread, and cheese

Serial
comma





Dates and Years

- Used to separating the day from the year when also writing the month.
- Ex: March 19, 2005
- Ex: June 17, 1905

Large Numbers

- Used to present large numbers in more readable forms
- Every 3 Places
- Ex: 1,500,275 = One million, five hundred thousand, two hundred seventy-five
- **Fun fact – In Europe and other countries, they use commas as decimal points and spaces for commas**



City and States

- Used to separate the city from the state
- Ex: Havertown, PA
- Ex: Orlando, Florida

Names and Titles

- Ex: Dr. Brown, PhD.
- Ex: Mrs. Smith, R.N, B.S.
- Also when using the last name first
- Ex: Bond, James
- Used often in books (and MLA)



Easy Ones Review

- Separate Items in a Series or List
- Dates and Years
- Large Numbers
- City and States
- Names and Titles
- Last Name First



Review 1

- Before Coordinating Conjunctions for Compound Sentences
- Set off an Introductory Phrase or Clause
- Transition/Introductory Words and Phrases
- Set off an Appositives and Parenthetical Phrases



Review 2

- Separate Adjectives
- Quoted Words and Dialogue
- Direct Address
- Phrases that Express Contrast
- Mild Interjections



And finally:

You have the power to put a comma in
wherever necessary to prevent confusion or
misreading

Ex: To George, Harrison had been a sort of
idol.

(note how it still sort of fits one of our rules)

More Help

- For more help ask me or download the presentation from the PlazWiki at <http://theplaz.com/wiki/index.php?title=Image:OWLComma.PPT>

Plaz



Exercise

- Pick: Shift one or two
- Your Shift: Get laptops
- Connect to the internet and go to <http://theplaz.com>
- Hit “Log in” at the top right of the page
- Type “Comma Rules” in to the search bar and hit “Go”

Exercise (cont)

- Find your number which I assigned to you and click on that
- Hit edit at the top of the page
- Edit the paragraph by inserting the commas where necessary. Fill in the total number of mistakes you found.
- Hit “Save this page” and call me over.
- The winner wins a “ThePlaz.com” T-Shirt

Sources

- My notes from 8th Grade.
- http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_comma.html (and other OWL pages)
- "Comma (punctuation)." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 3 Mar 2006, 19:32 UTC. 5 Mar 2006, 22:27
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Comma_\(punctuation\)&oldid=42089644](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Comma_(punctuation)&oldid=42089644)>. (and other pages)