

The Comma Rules – Taught by: Michael Plasmeier



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 when...

- 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.

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.
- 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

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

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)

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)

Crossword Puzzle

Z N Y U G K G S K J F I B S E P S Y I I
J A K R W Q B P P E O D J N E N W P N D
S M P D Q G H E H I C R B O O M U M T K
J E S A R H P L A N O I T I S O P E R P
J S P T F Z P D X I V D T T D D E B O Q
U T W E B Z C K X S F C G C X L C J D J
R I U S R U F K H H E Q I N Y E S Z U O
Z T S Y I A B P F J E N Y U I C G R C I
Q L Z E T N T R R W Z G M J Y K S W T A
L E O A E A X E B G Y N U N O B T M A R
A S Y R M T T V A T C B O O L C X N R C
R S E S S N V E V D D B O C L I S H Y D
G S J C I A N N A G J S M G B A X L P I
E H B D N S S T W I Y E G N Z D I I H N
N Z L B S A B C N U I S C I Q W W D R D
U I E N E D T O T L P A N T B I R F A I
M P X Y R H S N A N F R F A I T R R S B
B P F E I K M F E H D H K N C V W G E O
E F V Y E G G U C S S P E I C K E J V J
R I L G S V S S I J D G N D C B A S I V
S D R O W N O I T I S N A R T V A U T X
U X Y Y B A A O Y P Q I U O B I Y B I R
Y V P T U L M N S G D T E O H X B T S V
X N J D R K M T T G X S O C P C R F O B
N S J Z B U K D A T F A V I I M O B P C
R S S E R D D A T C E R I D L N O I P F
N T Q T P P H L E A D T F D Q K L C A S
L O O E A F P F W G C N Y C O M Z L F P
R M W M Q A L P K V W O Y Q P L V G C C
Q Z T Y W C E K M O H C D M B I O V S O

APPOSITIVES

CITYSTATE

COMPOUNDSENTANCES

CONTRASTINGPHRASES

COORDINATINGCONJUNCTIONS

DATESYEARS

DIALOUGE

DIRECTADDRESS

INTRODUCTARYPHRASE

ITEMSINSERIES

LARGENUMBERS

MILDINTERJECTIONS

NAMESTITLES

PREPOSITIONALPHRASE

PREVENTCONFUSION

SEPERATEADJECTIVES

TRANSITIONWORDS