

Name: _____

Commas

Hooray! The moment you've waited for is here! Today you're finally going to figure out those little squiggles that have plagued you for years. O.K., maybe it won't all happen in one day, but the point is that the rules aren't really hard, and we do cut you some slack with commas. There's a thing called "poetic license," which basically means when you're the writer you can do whatever you want if it conveys your mean-

People either use them

1. everywhere

OR

2. nowhere.

Before we go any further, decide which camp you're in. Now, look at the two statements below and put a check mark next to

"I think this sentence needs a comma, so it probably doesn't."

OR

"I think this sentence doesn't need a comma, so it probably does."

Once you figure out where you stand on these two burning issues, you can really begin to learn about commas. For some reason commas seem to be a confidence test for most students. Trust your gut. We're going to review and practice with the most important comma rules to help build your confidence, not to frustrate you. So

ing. Most likely you've relied on the old "put a comma in wherever you pause" rule. Often that will work, especially when you're writing fiction. Read over the following as guidelines to comma usage, and try really hard not to get yourself all worked up over this.

Here are the two most important things you need to know about commas:

the one that most frequently goes through your head:

approach these rules as suggestions for comma usage and remember that as the writer you usually get to make the final call. Also, if you find the rules make no sense to you, concentrate on the examples. Usually the examples clearly show what the jumble of words can't.



The Only Comma Rules You Really Need to Know

1. The Series Rule

When you are listing a few things in a row (usually it's a list of nouns), separate each item with a comma. Commas should also be placed between two or more adjectives preceding a noun.

Example	Dylan likes jazz, rock, and blues.
	Marcella makes to-die-for meatballs, exquisite sauce, and perfect pasta.

Notice the circle around the last comma? That's because you can leave it in

or take it out. Writer's choice. Just be consistent.

Examples of Adjectives Preceding a Noun:

She is a pretty, charming, kind young woman. (*Young woman* is a two-word noun here, thus there is no comma between *kind* and *young*.)

This rule does not apply if the two adjectives are thought of as one word, or if an adjective modifies the next adjective after it, and not the noun. (These are two ways of saying the same thing.)

Her dark red hair is beautiful.

2. Rule for Joining Two Sentences

When what you're really doing is combining two independent sentences into one longer sentence, and you use the conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *yet*, *so*, or *for*, put a comma BEFORE the conjunction.

Once again: The comma goes BEFORE the conjunction. Not on both sides of it, not after it, but BEFORE it!

Examples	(<i>conjunction in italics</i>):
	Sonya wants to go rollerblading, <i>but</i> I want to listen to a CD.
	He has access to the Internet, <i>and</i> now he's hoping to create his own Web site.
Lydia knew she loved Nigel, <i>yet</i> she wasn't sure she could actually marry him.	

NOTE: In all of these examples I could have put a period where the comma is now. Then I would have omitted the conjunction, capitalized the first word of the next main clause, and I would have had two complete sentences. That would have been totally

fine. Sometimes it's good to have short sentences, but sometimes it's not. This rule helps to give variety to your writing by showing you how to use coordinating conjunctions to create longer sentences. (See page 27 for more on conjunctions.)

Something to Think About: Why is no comma needed in the following?

He has access to the Internet and is hoping to create his own Web site.



Something Else to Think About: Please note, I did not say put a comma every time you use the word *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, etc. That's NOT what this rule says. Only if you have two complete sentences joined by a conjunction do you need the comma BEFORE the conjunction. However, if the two sentences are short, you don't need to use the comma.

Example He is tired but he is happy.



Exercise 4.2

Practice the first two comma rules on the sentences below. Put commas in wherever you think they are needed. Some sentences are fine the way they are and do not need a comma.

1. It's often a great deal of work but the holidays are usually worth the effort.
2. The signal was given the control button was pressed and the rocket burst into the sky on its first mission.
3. I never expected to see them again but like bad pennies they returned the next day.
4. Alex craned his neck and heard the scary noise again.
5. Proper equipment is needed for sailing across the Atlantic and an experienced crew is helpful.
6. The waiter brought a vegetarian omelet hash browns toast and coffee for breakfast.
7. She woke up and tried to fall back to sleep.
8. Hank went shopping and for once he didn't buy anything.
9. I met her on Monday and married her on Saturday.
10. It was a cold raw dark November day but I loved it.

3. Rule for Sentences Beginning with a Subordinating Conjunction or Introductory Clause

If a sentence begins with a subordinating conjunction (e.g., *although*, *because*, *while*, *until*, etc.), put a comma at the end of the dependent clause. If the subordinating conjunction is in the middle of the sentence, the comma is left out.

Or if you can hear it better this way...

When a sentence begins with an incomplete thought, join it to the rest of the sentence with a comma at the place it links with the real sentence.

However, when the incomplete thought is in the middle of the sentence, the comma is often not needed.

This rule tests whether you understand the difference between phrases and clauses, and can recognize a subordinating conjunction when you see one. Refer to page 27 on

conjunctions and pages 38–44 on phrases and clauses. Look at the following examples, and I bet this will all make sense.



Examples	Although I don't want to admit it, commas are starting to make sense.
	And Its Reverse
	Commas are starting to make sense although I don't want to admit it.
	<i>Now read the rule over again. Does it make sense? Let's look at more examples:</i>
Examples	Because I want to be a rock climber, I need to get the right kind of shoes.
	And Its Reverse
	I need to get the right kind of shoes because I want to be a rock climber.

Not all introductory clauses and phrases start with a subordinating conjunction. As long as the introductory clause is not acting as the subject of the sentence, it usually will take a comma.

Examples	Holding the torch in her hand, the athlete led the procession into the Olympic stadium.
	(Here we need the comma because the introductory phrase is just giving us additional information about that athlete.)
	<i>But if I rewrite the sentence this way, no comma is needed:</i>
	To carry the torch into the Olympic stadium is every athlete's dream.
Examples	(Here the introductory phrase is acting as the subject of the sentence. It's essential to the meaning of the sentence and therefore no comma is needed.)

Something to Think About: If a sentence starts with several prepositional phrases, a comma comes after the last phrase.

Example	At the edge of the deep woods in the forests of rural Maine, he built a cabin.
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4. Commas with Dialogue and Quotation Marks

This rule is simple: The comma goes **INSIDE** quotation marks. Always. No exceptions. Whether the quotation marks signify

dialogue or anything else, the comma goes **INSIDE**. (The same rule applies to periods, by the way.)



If the dialogue is broken up by an interrupter, don't forget to add a comma after the interrupter.

Examples	"You'll be tested on every mark of punctuation you've ever heard of on Friday," the teacher snapped.
	AND
	"You'll be tested on every mark of punctuation you've ever heard of," the teacher snapped, "and Friday's the day."
	(Notice: I didn't have to capitalize the "A" in "and" because it's just a continuation of the sentence. You only have to capitalize after an interrupter if a new sentence is beginning.)
	AND
	Terry, known to the class as the "grammar king," passed the test with flying colors.

5. Words Not Really Essential to a Sentence

If there are words in a sentence that can be removed without changing the basic meaning of the sentence, you need commas around the words you could omit.

Examples	Mr. Wade, <i>the oldest man on the tour</i> , was the life of the party.
	(This sentence is really about Mr. Wade's high jinks. The fact that he's the oldest man on the tour is just extra information and not really necessary to the intent of the sentence.)
	My uncle, <i>who used to be a police officer</i> , now spends all his time on the golf course.
	(Italicized words are not necessary for a complete sentence.)
	Nicki, <i>I bet</i> , will go to the next Whitney Houston concert no matter where it is.
	(Italicized words are the speaker's interjection; without it, the thought is still complete.)
	Yes, I do hope to win the lottery one day.
	(The basic information here is that the writer wants free cash. The word "Yes" just tells us that the writer is responding to someone's question. It could be removed from the sentence and we'd still understand the statement.)



6. Dates and Addresses

Use commas to separate the city or town from the state, items in an address when they're written on a single line, day of the month from the year, day of the week from the day of the month and year, and items in a date when written in a sentence.

Examples	I once lived in Chicago, Illinois.
	Forward our mail to 10 Pleasant Street, Chicago, Illinois, beginning immediately.
	Bob's birth date is May 17, 1975.
	Bob's birth date is Monday, May 17, 1975.
	Bob was born on Monday, May 17, 1975, in East Meadow, New York.



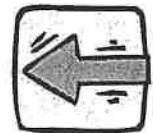
Exercise 4.3

In the following sentences, place commas where they are needed. Not all sentences require one.

1. While Ashley was talking to Kevin Jenna entered the room.
2. The quiet seaside soothed him into the relaxed state he needed for a vacation.
3. Some of the students were eating others were doing homework but most were just goofing off.
4. The girls had just enough money to buy their school supplies at the department store.
5. Having sailed around the world twice already Barney was looking for a new adventure.
6. When Kasia arrived from Poland she found learning a new language and the new cultural rules overwhelming.
7. Kyle asked "Maggie will you go with me to the movie on Saturday?"
8. The poet e.e. cummings did not use capital letters and his punctuation was frequently unconventional.
9. A child playing in the street risks losing his life.
10. Melanie moved to Richmond Virginia on June 1 1997 and in 1998 she plans to move to Dallas Texas.
11. Rock climbing has become a popular sport and its popularity seems to be growing.
12. Behaving like a spoiled child Frederick sulked until Edna gave in.
13. Sally's brother thought they should get two turkeys for Thanksgiving since 28 guests were planning to come.



14. I like chicken mayonnaise and mustard on my sandwich.
15. The two friendly students both got jobs at the gym.
16. Hagos will I am sure let me borrow the car tomorrow.
17. While taking an afternoon stroll in the park my little brother made friends with three squirrels two elderly gentlemen and a score of toddlers.
18. She is beautiful in fact stunning is more the word.
19. Peter's most prized possession was his 18-speed mountain bike.
20. "I began running at the age of 10" Aimee said "but I got serious about training in high school."
21. To drive across the country was Sophia's last wish.
22. Frank got a job at the Hotel Continental 443 Newbury Street Boston Massachusetts for the summer.
23. Blanca will help us after she finishes her own assignment.
24. Lisa one of my closest friends recently moved out of town.
25. Harriet was quite a talented ballplayer and made sure everyone knew it.
26. For breakfast we had ham and eggs orange juice toast and coffee.
27. My new friend Thung is hoping to find a job as an engineer which is what she was in Cambodia.
28. He thought the remark his wife made was either brilliant or the beginnings of a serious mental illness.
29. As we sat on the veranda of our spacious summer home we wondered how we would ever leave the place.
30. "Yes I'm talking to you" the angry mother informed her young son.



Name _____

Punctuation

Commas

Comma usage does vary, but the following rules should be helpful:

1. Use a comma to separate independent clauses joined by the coordinating conjunctions *and, but, yet, neither, nor, or, so, or yet*, unless each clause is very short.

Examples: Brad will bring a variety of snacks, and Sarah will bring three or four videos.
The sky darkened, and the rain fell. (two short independent clauses)

2. Use a comma to separate a dependent (subordinate) clause from the main clause when the subordinate clause comes first. When the subordinate clause is in the middle, set it off with commas only if it is not essential to identifying the noun that precedes it.

Examples: The city in Louisiana which is the capital is Baton Rouge. (essential)
Baton Rouge, which is the capital of Louisiana, is in Cajun country.
(not essential)

Place commas where appropriate in each sentence. Some sentences need no commas.

1. The chapter which comes next contains the scary part.
2. Chapter 24 which contains the scary part was assigned for homework.
3. Although they aren't millionaires they travel in style.
4. The room was tiny and the view was not so good.
5. The bed in the room was lumpy but she fell asleep anyway.
6. She must set the alarm or risk missing the train.
7. if she missed the train she would be late for a very important appointment.
8. Alex missed the ticketing deadline so his ticket was much more expensive.
9. When you read her resumé you'll see that she is well-qualified.
10. The man whom they met in Paris was from Afghanistan.

Name _____

Punctuation

Commas

Here are more uses for commas:

1. Use the **comma** to separate words, phrases, and clauses in a series.

Example: Stop, look, and listen.

2. Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives when they modify the same noun. *And, or, or nor* make commas unnecessary when they are placed between adjectives. If an adjective actually modifies the adjective that follows it as well as the noun, do not separate the adjectives with a comma.

Examples: Sherry was a loquacious, gregarious person. (modify same noun)
Sherry was loquacious and gregarious. (uses and between adjectives)
The garden was surrounded by an old stone fence. (1st adjective modifies 2nd adjective)

Add commas where they are appropriate. Some sentences do not need commas.

1. She has midterm exams this week in English Social Studies and Biology.
2. Do you need to change the size or style of the lettering?
3. The home is spacious and comfortable.
4. The speaker was nervous sweating and miserable.
5. The well-stocked grocery store contains anything you might need.
6. He was a cunning military analyst.
7. Trains in Germany are usually fast efficient comfortable and plentiful.
8. Pascali Pristine Fragrant Cloud and Brandy are some of my favorite roses.
9. Nathan dated Natalie Nicole Natasha Nancy Nina and Nadine in the same year.
10. Pecans chocolate chips butter sugar eggs and flour are in these cookies.
11. Eat drink and be merry!
12. Her campaign for governor was aggressive hard-hitting and expensive.

