



Using Commas

Commas indicate pauses and help writing be clear and pleasant. The main uses of the comma are listed below.

DO use commas...

<p>✓ Before the coordinating conjunction that joins two independent clauses. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She tied her shoe, and then she went outside. • The game was over, but the crowd refused to leave. • They were different in many ways, yet they still loved and respected each other. 	<p>✓ After introductory clauses, phrases, or words. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the snow stops falling, we'll shovel the driveway. • In addition, walking improves posture. • Having finished the test early, he left the room. • To get a seat, come early.
<p>✓ To set off non-essential information from the main sentence. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The class assignment, unless I misunderstood, is due today. • Fred, who is Tracy's brother, received the poetry award. • In this case, however, she seems to have overexerted herself. 	<p>✓ To separate concluding words, phrases, or other clauses from the main clause that precedes it. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She forgot her homework assignment, however. • We spent the day at the park, which is where I met Sally. • "Clean your room," my mother asserted.
<p>✓ To separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses written in a series. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary loves swimming, sailing, and playing tennis. • I was prepared for class because I studied with a partner, I listened in class, and I took good notes. 	<p>✓ Near the end of a sentence to separate contrasted coordinate elements or to indicate a distinct pause or shift. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was merely ignorant, not stupid. • The chimpanzee seemed reflective, almost human.
<p>✓ To set off a direct quotation from the rest of the sentence. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John said, "I'll see you tomorrow." • "I was able," she answered, "to complete the assignment." 	<p>✓ Between two or more coordinate adjectives (adjectives that have equal status and can be switched in order) that describe the same noun. Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was a difficult, stubborn child. (He was a stubborn, difficult child.)
<p>✓ To set off all geographical names and addresses. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birmingham, Alabama, gets its name from Birmingham, England. • She was born in Richmond, Virginia. 	<p>✓ To set off a noun of direct address (a person spoken to), and in the openings and closings of letters and emails. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jennifer, please come here. • Have you been, Terry, to the new movie theater? • Greetings Professor Jones,
<p>✓ Wherever to prevent possible confusion or misreading. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To George Harrison had been a sort of idol. (Incorrect: confusing) To George, Harrison had been a sort of idol. (Correct) • Running Jill and John finished before Sally and Sam. (Incorrect: confusing) Running, Jill and John finished before Sally and Sam. (Correct) 	<p>✓ To set of items in dates (except the month and day) and titles in names). Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 22, 1956, was a momentous day in his life • Rachel B. Lake, M.D., will be the principal speaker.



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Commas in the wrong places can break a sentence into illogical segments or confuse readers with unnecessary and unexpected pauses. The main comma-use mistakes are addressed below.

DO NOT use commas...

<p>✘ To separate the subject from the verb. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An eighteen-year-old in California, is now considered an adult. (Incorrect) An eighteen-year-old in California is now considered an adult. (Correct) • One of Mary’s best personality characteristics, is her generous nature. (Incorrect) One of Mary’s best personality characteristics is her generous nature. (Correct) • The cousin that spent a year abroad in Spain, returned to the United States a week ago. (Incorrect) The cousin that spent a year abroad in Spain returned to the United States a week ago. (Correct) 	<p>✘ After the main clause when a dependent (subordinate) clause follows it (except for cases of extreme contrast). Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She was late for class, because her alarm clock was broken. (Incorrect) She was late for class because her alarm clock was broken. (Correct) • She was still quite upset, although she had won the Oscar. (Correct: extreme contrast, acceptable stylistic choice)
<p>✘ Between the two verbs or verb phrases in a compound predicate. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jane and Michael chatted, and laughed all evening. (Incorrect) Jane and Michael chatted and laughed all evening. (Correct) • We laid out our music and snacks, and began to study. (Incorrect) We laid out or music and snacks and began to study. (Correct) 	<p>✘ After a subordinate conjunction beginning with “so that.” Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I ate a small dinner, so that I would have room for ice cream later. (Incorrect) I ate a small dinner so that I would have room for ice cream later. (Correct)
<p>✘ Between the two nouns, noun phrases, or noun clauses in a compound subject or compound object. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The music teacher from your high school, and the football coach from mine are married. (Incorrect: compound subject) The music teacher from your high school and the football coach from mine are married. (Correct) • Jeff told me that the job was still available, and that the manager wanted to interview me. (Incorrect: compound object) Jeff told me that the job was still available and that the manager wanted to interview me. (Correct) 	<p>✘ To set off essential elements of the sentence. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The apples, that fell out of the basket, are bruised. (Incorrect) The apples that fell out of the basket are bruised. (Correct) • The candidate, who had the least money, lost the election. (Incorrect) The candidate who had the least money lost the election. (Correct)