



Comma Usage

Definition: The comma is a mark of punctuation used for indicating a division in a sentence, as in setting off a word, phrase, or clause, especially when such a division is accompanied by a slight pause.

When to use commas:

1. Use commas to separate independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions. (**FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so**)

Ex: She had worked all day, **but** there was still more work to be done.

Ex: Mitch loves coffee, **so** he goes to Starbuck's every morning.

2. Use commas between items in a series.

Ex: The girl collected rocks, coins, and stamps.

Ex: Mrs. Alexander handed out pencils, paper, and glue.

3. Use commas between coordinate adjectives (adjectives that modify equally) not joined by **and** that precede a noun.

Ex: Last night I saw a scary, violent movie.

Ex: Cindy was an independent, confident, talented woman

4. Generally, use a comma to separate an introductory verbal phrase or a dependent clause.

Ex: After the Halloween dance, Estelle walked Raul home.

Ex: At the end of the play, everyone clapped for Lucy.

5. Use a comma on both sides of a common word or word group that interrupts the sentence.

Ex: The dog, however, appeared to be fine.

Ex: Eleanor, the daughter of the duke, was always late.

6. Use a comma to set off quoted elements.

Ex: According to the article, Smith states, "The environment is still very much a cause for concern."

7. Use a comma to avoid confusion.

Ex: Suddenly he felt lost and afraid. (Incorrect.)

Suddenly, he felt lost and afraid. (Correct.)

Ex: For most the year has just begun. (Incorrect.)

For most, the year has just begun. (Correct.)

When not to use commas:

1. Don't use a comma if the independent clause is joined by *because*, *when*, *if*, *until*, or *any other dependent word*. Don't confuse these words with FANBOYS.

2. Don't overuse commas. Try not to use a comma unless it can be applied to a specific rule.

3. Don't ever use only one comma between a subject and its verb.

4. Don't use a comma to separate two independent clauses (**comma splice**). Instead of a comma, use a period, semicolon, or a coordinating conjunction. A comma by itself is not enough punctuation to join two sentences.

Ex: Jane Austen created the character of Anne Elliot, she also created Elizabeth Bennet. (Incorrect.)

1. Jane Austen created the character of Anne Elliot. She also created Elizabeth Bennet. (Correct.)

2. Jane Austen created the character of Anne Elliot; she also created Elizabeth Bennet. (Correct.)

3. Jane Austen created the character of Anne Elliot, **and** she also created Elizabeth Bennet. (Correct.)

YouTube Links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keZpj7PjNEo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYXTX80i1Cw>

Online Resources:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/01/>

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/commas.htm>

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/exercises/3/5/>