

COMMA WORKSHOP

COMMA GUIDELINES

A. Use a comma after every item in a series except the last one. The series, a group of three or more, may be made of words, phrases, or clauses.

She brought pickles, chips, and drinks to the party.

She offered to help with the dishes, with the painting, and with the yard work.

John drove to the store, Mary paid for the items, and little Joe carried them home.

B. Use commas after first, second, third, etc., when these words introduce a series.

C. When there are two or more coordinate adjectives, use commas between them. If you can test the adjectives by putting *and* between them, they are coordinate. If you cannot use *and* between them, they are probably not coordinate and will not require a comma.

She wore a **blue wool** suit. (not coordinate adjectives)

She bought an **expensive, hand-made** suit. (coordinate adjectives)

EXERCISE

Use commas where necessary.

1. Mary played her CD her radio and her TV all at the same time.
2. I knocked at the door rang the doorbell and finally peeked through the window.
3. He was an efficient productive happy young man.
4. In making the best eggnog, you need to use the following steps: first allow the eggs to get to room temperature; second separate the yolks from the whites; third beat the whites until they are stiff.
5. She asked me to bring chairs a card table and a fruit bowl to the party.
6. We need to project what must be done how long it will take and how much it will cost.
7. She used colorful imaginative inexpensive decorations for the party.
8. Unless he is sick, he has nervous restless energy.
9. First open your book to page twenty; second take out a piece of paper; third answer all the questions on the page; fourth compare your answers with your partner.
10. Her piano playing was enhanced because of her long slender fingers.

D. Use commas to separate introductory words, long phrases, and clauses from the rest of the sentence.

Repeatedly, she gave the same answer.
Because of a pre-existing condition, she was not eligible for insurance.
Walking along the beach, he spotted a jelly fish on the sand.
Because everyone is not alike, people have different learning styles.

E. When there are little pauses, a comma may be left out.

Last evening it rained really hard.

F. Use commas to separate words, phrases, or clauses that interrupt the train of thought in a sentence.

Mary, consequently, won't be there.
She said, I think, that she would be late.

EXERCISE

Use commas where necessary.

1. After the fire was out the exhausted firefighters went home to bed.
2. It is very hard I believe to do two things at once.
3. Although spiders are very creepy creatures they are very useful.
4. Hoping to improve the situation John apologized to Josephine.
5. She had already mowed the lawn before most of the family were even up.
6. She announced therefore that her work for the day was finished.
7. Looking for some relaxation and unwinding she went for ice cream.
8. Fortunately the ice cream parlor was open.
9. Later in the day she had cooled off.
10. They were as anyone could observe friends again.
11. No they will not have that kind of misunderstanding again.
12. Furthermore they felt childish after they had made up.

G. Set off nouns of direct address with commas.

Deborah, did you get an answer to your question?
Did you get an answer, Deborah, to your question?
Did you get and answer to your question, Deborah?

H. Use commas to set off most appositives. When an appositive is a single name, it is not usually set off with commas.

Mrs. Rogers, one of our English teachers, will direct the discussion.
She attends the local college, Utah Valley State College.

but

My sister Carole lives in American Fork.

EXERCISE

Use commas where necessary.

1. Susan I'm going out for a few minutes.
2. I'm going John for ice cream.
3. Ms. Johnson works for Geneva a local steel company.
4. Marilyn John wants to speak to you.
5. Do you suppose Senator Hatch that the country will recover economically?
6. Our house the red house in the middle of the block was the first house on our street.
7. My assistant Barbara Roberts will answer any questions you have.
8. Albany the capital of the state of New York is famous for its arts.
9. Our cat Rattles is nearly twelve years old.
10. Tammi my oldest daughter teaches elementary school.
11. Class could I have your attention please?
12. I want you to know Ms. Barlow that you have not treated me respectfully.

I. Use commas to set off explanatory words in a direct quote. These explanatory words can occur at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence. Commas and capitalization are used based on the position of the explanatory statement in the sentence.

Doni said, " My apartment has been too hot this summer."
"My apartment," Doni said, "has been too hot this summer."
"My apartment has been too hot this summer," said Doni.

J. Commas are not used to set an indirect quote from the rest of the sentence.

Doni said that her apartment has been too hot this summer.

K. When joining two complete sentences (independent clauses) with a coordinating conjunction, use a comma before the conjunction. If two short sentences are joined by *and*, the comma is not necessary. If *but* or *or* is used and the second sentence is a contrast to the first, commas are used.

EXERCISE

Use commas where necessary.

1. Craig tried to force the window but it had been painted shut.
2. Annie asked "Have you tried a chisel?"
3. Everyday the hummingbirds buzz the cat and drink nectar from the trumpet vine.
4. She reluctantly agreed that she had to leave.
5. Meg tried but she could not get her car started.
6. "I think I will begin" Mark announced "to paint the house."
7. They have been renting for two years but now they want to buy a house.
8. She mowed the lawn and pruned the roses.
9. "I plan to graduate in the spring" she gleefully announced.
10. Beat the eggs well and then add the sugar.
11. Thomas said that he had to work late tonight.
12. The children cried "We want to play in the water but you won't let us."

L. Commas in dates should separate the day of the month and the year and the date itself from the rest of the sentence. Commas are not used to separate the month and the day or the month and the year.

Saturday, August 22, 1992, is the date of their wedding.
August 1992 will go down in history as one of the hottest and driest ever.

M. Commas should separate cities from states and countries. These items should, as with dates, be separated from the sentence as well.

Provo/Orem, Utah, is considered by a number of sources the number one place in the nation to live.

Next year London, England, is our destination.

O. When an address is used in the context of a sentence, separate items with commas in the same way they would be separated on an envelope. Do not, however, separate the state from the ZIP code.

Mail your questions to Ms. Mary Smith, 1505 North Street, Portland, Oregon 95036.

P. Use a comma following the greeting in a friendly letter. Use a comma after the closing of all letters.

Dear Duane,

Very truly yours,

EXERCISE

Use commas where necessary.

1. On May 6 1968 I was busy preparing for the birth of my third child.
2. I was listening to the radio on November 22 1963 when the announcement came that John F. Kennedy had been shot.
3. Robert returned to his childhood home at 155 East 500 North Provo Utah.
4. In January 1969 Duane began his job at Brigham Young University.
5. I mailed the form to State Farm Insurance Company 230 North 200 West Provo Utah 84601.
6. Brian has lived in Anchorage Alaska his entire life.
7. She was born on December 24 1940 but celebrates her birthday on June 24.
8. She has lived in Baton Rouge Louisiana for the last three years.
9. Carlos was last seen just before the earthquake in Mexico City Mexico.
10. On August 3 1965 she began life in Berkeley California.

Q. Use commas to set apart nonessential clauses. A nonessential clause is not necessary for complete understanding of a sentence. An essential clause must be used to clarify the meaning of general words in a sentence. **Commas are not used with essential clauses.**

Nonessential clause: **My mother, *who was always a very particular housekeeper*, was sometimes called “Old Dutch.” (The clause is not necessary.)**

Essential clause: **My mother was a woman *who was always a very particular housekeeper*. (The clause is necessary.)**

R. Use a comma to prevent confusion.

In Roger, Edward found friendship.
Looking up, Jackson found the mountain formidable.

EXERCISE

Use commas where necessary.

1. We saw Marian who we thought was home in bed pedaling her bicycle toward home.
2. The school that is on the corner is the one my children attend.

3. Above the mountains rose like great purple statues.
4. When the neighbors dashed over Elizabeth felt relieved.
5. The bishop who performed the marriage was an uncle to the bride.
6. Inspiring teachers are those who help students develop skills and a love for learning.
7. The man who is standing by the blue car is my brother-in-law.
8. Kit and Kelly who will be rooming together next year are my nephews.
9. Ahead of us the road wound around the steep mountain; behind it seemed to drop from sight.
10. The name of the person who won the drawing will be announced later this evening.
11. The number that you just dialed has been disconnected.
12. The man on the corner who is my brother will organize the festival.
13. Whatever she says she usually doesn't mean.
14. I usually call on students who are paying attention.
15. But sometimes I call on students who are not paying attention.