

# AN INTRODUCTION TO COMMA USAGE

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Punctuation allows for a greater understanding of words and meanings within sentences. This web page has been designed to acquaint the reader with comma rules. Don't fear commas—learn how to use them correctly. The following rules will have you writing much clearer in no time.

- 1. Place a comma before one of the seven coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) when it joins one independent clause (a group of words that can act as a complete sentence) to another.**

An easy way to remember the coordinating conjunctions is with the acronym FANBOYS:

<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>S</i>
<i>O</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>R</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>T</i>		<i>T</i>	

*The sidewalk is icy, and I'm afraid I might slip.*

*Superman was the first super-hero, yet Batman is more popular today.*

*I did all of my homework, so I was well prepared for my English test.*

- 2. Place commas between items in a series.**

*The puppy was boisterous, happy, and begging for affection.*

*I need to take a computer class, a math class, and two Spanish classes to graduate.*

**An exception to this rule occurs when there is reason to internally punctuate each item with commas. In such cases, a semicolon should be used between the items.**

*Present at the charity function were the Utah Jazz's Karl Malone, who is a two time MVP; John Stockton, who holds the NBA's assist record; and John Starks, who used to play for the New York Knicks.*

- 3. Place a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or clause that doesn't flow smoothly into the main body of the sentence.**

*Yes, I would love to go to the movies.*

*Even though I ran up three flights of stairs, I still arrived four minutes late to class.*

**When the introductory phrase is short and there is no danger of misreading the sentence, the comma may be omitted.**

*After the test he was exhausted.*

- 4. Place a comma before an afterthought that is added to the end of a sentence.**

*Dan had a smile on his face, an expression he normally wore after a night out with the ladies.*

*My jokes are funny, aren't they?*

- 5. Place commas around expressions that interrupt the flow of a sentence, such as *of course*, *however*, or *on the other hand*.**

*The professor was, of course, late for our his conference with the student.*

- 6. Use a comma to set off quoted material in a sentence when introduced with an expression such as *he said* or *she stated*.**

*"Class, your essays need more discussion," the professor remarked, "but your organization is top notch."*

*The student replied, "We'll try harder next time."*

- 7. Place a comma between adjectives that describe the same noun.**

An easy way to test whether the adjectives describe the same noun is by reading the sentence with an *and* between the two adjectives. In the following example, *and* fits nicely between the two adjectives, so the comma is appropriate.

*The professor's patient, compassionate nature put the student at ease.*

- 8. Set off non-essential information (information that is not essential to a sentence's meaning) with commas.**

This is a tough concept to grasp, but there are ways to decide whether an element is essential to the meaning of a sentence. A simple way is to read a sentence without the element. Is the meaning still clear without it? Then set it off with commas. Here are some examples:

*David, who lives in Ogden, Utah, hopes to graduate next year.*

*Weber State University's colors, purple and white, are also my two favorite colors.*

And here are two examples of necessary information, which should not be set off with commas because the information is essential for the reader to understand the sentence:

*All I could see were the colors purple and white at the football game.*

*The student who organized a rally over tuition fees hopes to graduate next year.*

### **8. Use commas to punctuate dates, addresses, and titles:**

When giving a date using the formula of month, day, and year, place a comma directly after the day. Additionally, place a comma after the year if the date occurs in the middle of the sentence.

*Lucy was born on December 20, 1979, at McKay-Dee Hospital.*

When punctuating addresses, place a comma between street address and city, and place a comma between city and state.

*Weber State University's address is 3750 Harrison Boulevard, Ogden, Utah 84401.*

### **9. Use a comma (or commas) to separate a person's title from his or her name and from the rest of a sentence.**

*Michael Fieldberg, M.D., was to give a lecture on AIDS.*

### **10. Place commas around the name of the person or people being directly addressed.**

*No, I will never go out with you, Daniel, so stop asking.*

*The next workshop, class, will be about commas.*

This is simply an introduction, and not a definitive comma-usage reference. Uncommon terminology has been left out for the sake of clarity. To continue improving your punctuation skills, review a writing handbook such as the ones listed below.

## References

*A Pocket Style Manual* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. by Dianne Hacker.

*The Least You Should Know about English Writing Skills* by Teresa Ferster Glazier

*MLA Handbook for Writers* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. by Joseph Garibaldi

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