

Commas

The most used and misused punctuation mark, the comma, indicates a pause in the flow of a sentence. *Not all sentence pauses, however, require commas.* It is important for you to learn the standard rules for the use of commas so that you will not be tempted to clutter your sentences with needless, distracting commas. Here are the guidelines for basic comma usage.

Coordinating Conjunctions

When a coordinating conjunction joins independent clauses, use a comma before the coordinating conjunction. Coordinating conjunctions connect clauses of equal grammatical value or rank. Coordinating conjunctions include *and, but, for, so, or, nor, yet* (FANBOYS).

- Mr. Freeman opens the mail, *but* Miss Santana fills the orders.
- James uses his cell phone, *and* Jan prefers her PDA.

Items in a Series

Commas are used to separate three or more equally ranked (coordinate) elements (words, phrases, or short clauses) in a series. A comma before the conjunction ensures separation of the last two items.

- Only in June, July, and August is a lifeguard available.
- Wireless technology enables you to respond to customers' requests, change sales forecasts, and manage suppliers even when you are away from the office.

Introductory Elements

Phrases or clauses that precede main clauses should be followed by commas.

- To qualify for the position, you must have two years' experience.
- Climbing quickly, the hikers reached the summit by noon.
- When you have finished, please return the style manual.

Parenthetical Expressions

Parenthetical words, phrases, and clauses may be used to create transitions between thoughts. These expressions interrupt the flow of a sentence and are unessential to its grammatical completeness. These commonly used expressions are considered unessential. Set off these expressions with commas.

- This report is not, however, one that must be classified.
- Online customers, therefore, can conduct secure transactions.

Direct Address

Words and phrases or direct address are set off with commas.

- You must agree, Ms. Adams, that Ramon has done outstanding work.
- I respectfully request, sir, that I be transferred.

Dates, Addresses, and Geographical Items

When dates, addresses, and geographical items contain more than one element, the second and succeeding elements are normally set off by commas.

Dates

- On January 8 we opened for business. [However, you would never be wrong for placing a comma after “January 8” because it is an introductory element.]
- On January 8, 2006, we opened for business.
- On Monday, January 8, 2006, we opened for business.

Addresses

- Send the software to Mr. Chun Wong, 1639 East 69 Street, Cleveland, Ohio 44116. [Notice that there is no comma between the state and zip code.]

Geographical Items

- He moved from Nashville, Tennessee, to Chicago, Illinois.

Degrees and Abbreviations

Except for *Jr.* and *Sr.*, degrees, personal titles, and professional designations flowing individuals’ names are set off by commas.

- John T. O’Dell Jr. is frequently confused with John T. O’Dell Sr.
- Dana Fladhammer, M.D., has a flourishing practice in Tempe, Arizona.
- Judith Lounsbury, Ph.D., discussed degree requirements with the college president.

Numerals

Unrelated figures appearing side by side should be separated by commas.

- By 2008, 2.3 billion subscribers will be using wireless devices worldwide.
- On page 10, two illustrations show the wiring diagram.

Numbers of more than three digits require commas. However calendar years and zip codes are written without commas within the numerals. Telephone numbers, house numbers are also written without commas within the numerals.

1, 760 47, 950 6,500,000

Contrasting Statements

Commas are used to set off contrasting or opposing expressions. These expressions are often introduced by such words as *not*, *never*, *but*, and *yet*.

- Our budget for equipment this year is reduced, yet quite adequate.
- The harder our staff works, the further behind we seem to get.

Clarity

Commas are used to separate words, repeated for emphasis and words that may be misread if not separated.

- Susan Keegan said that it is a very, very complex contract.
- Whoever goes, goes at his or her own expense.
- No matter what, you now you have our support.

Short Quotations

A comma is used to separate a short quotation from the rest of the sentence. If the quotation is divided into two parts, two commas are used.

- Alice Beasley said, “The first product to use a bar code was Wrigley’s gum.”
- “The first product to use a bar code,” said Alice Beasley, “was Wrigley’s gum.”

Commas Exercises

Directions: Insert necessary commas.

1. Tuesday September 11 2001 is a day that cannot be forgotten
2. Hong Kong is on the other hand one of the most densely populated areas in the world.
3. The Small Business Administration named Alaska South Dakota and New Hampshire as the states most friendly to entrepreneurs.
4. Denise lived in Palm Springs California before she began working in Seattle Washington.
5. Your student Troy Adkins called this morning.
6. Emily Hale your accounting student also called.
7. In the winter we always hire additional personnel in the warehouse and in the office.
8. Your car Mr. Takeda is not properly registered.
9. We have no doubt that such practices are widespread.

10. Disney World offers a wedding package that includes a pavilion a horse-drawn coach and two footmen.
11. To succeed in life you must be willing to fail.
12. At the end of each fiscal year we prepare a progress report.
13. By November we are able to predict with considerable accuracy the year's profits.
14. It takes 43 facial muscles to frown but it takes only 17 muscles to smile.
15. If the telephone is not answered by the third ring we risk lost sales.
16. We risk lost sales if the telephone is not answered by the third ring.
17. The work in this office is strictly confidential as I am sure you are well aware.
18. The person who answers the telephone sounds alert and responsive.
19. Dr. Morris Edleson plans to attend the conference in London and later he expects to vacation in Europe.
20. When you have completed this exercise you are to check your answers.
21. What it is is a matter of principle.
22. The first loan was made on February 3; the second June 1.
23. "Those who cannot remember the past" said George Santayana "are condemned to repeat it.
24. Mayel Alwar CPA listed the firm's assets at \$873,500.
25. On page 16 20 lines of text describe proper cell phone use.
26. We are issuing Policy No. 2176800394 in your name.
27. We are expecting Miss Weber not Mr. Allen to conduct the audit.
28. "A resume is a balance sheet without any liabilities" said personnel specialist Robert Half.
29. The octogenerains had known each other for a long long time.

30. In the winter Susan Madarieta who was recently hired away from Cyber Vision will join the executive staff as chief information officer.