

A Brief Guide to Using Commas

1. Use a comma when you **link two or more sentences** with one of the coordinating conjunctions: **F(for)A(and)N(nor)B(but)O(or)Y(yet)S(so)**.
 - a. The year was 2081, and everybody was finally equal.
2. Use commas with **three or more items in a list**.
 - a. She is a child of her age, of depression, of war, and of fear.
3. Use a comma to **separate most OPENING chunks of text from the rest of the sentence**.
 - a. Although I try to avoid eating pizza because I consider it unhealthy, sometimes I cannot resist having a slice.
 - b. Certainly, any plan that is enacted must be fair.
 - c. In other words, we cannot act hastily.
4. Put commas around **“interrupters” or words in the MIDDLE of a sentence that are not essential** to the meaning of the sentence.
 - a. The restaurant, which only serves breakfast and lunch, was closed.

Note that if the information inside the commas is removed, the sentence still makes sense.
5. In most cases, use commas to **set off a direct quotation from the identifying tag**—the phrase that identifies the speaker (*he said, she answered*).
 - a. The person said to me, “Why don’t alligators like to eat clowns?”
6. Use commas in **dates and addresses**:
 - a. On June 4, 2005, a dog walked into a house in Paris, Texas, and ate a pair of shoes.
7. To separate **adjectives that describe the same noun** (coordinate adjectives).
 - a. I drank the sweet, cold lemonade.
 - b. It felt like the hot, sticky summer would never end.

Note that you can put “and” instead of a comma between the adjectives. (Sweet and cold lemonade; hot and sticky summer.)
8. Use a comma to set off **nouns of direct address**:
 - a. Mom, you’re the best.
 - b. Be quiet, Toto!

Commas are NOT necessary in the following examples:

- NOT between a subject and a verb
 - INCORRECT: The gifts she received from her colleagues, made her realize her value.
 - CORRECT: The gifts she received from her colleagues made her realize her value.
- NOT between a verb and its object or complement
 - INCORRECT: The best gifts are, food and clothes
 - CORRECT: The best gifts are food and clothes.
- NOT before part of a compound sentence that is not an independent clause
 - INCORRECT: She won the trophy, and accepted it gracefully.
 - CORRECT: She won the trophy and accepted it gracefully.
- NOT before a clause beginning with “that”

- INCORRECT: They warned us, that the meeting would be difficult.
- CORRECT: They warned us that the meeting would be difficult.
- NOT with a subordinating conjunction (after, before, because, if, since, unless, until, when)
 - INCORRECT: She will continue working for the city, until she has saved enough for graduate school.
 - CORRECT: She will continue working for the city until she has saved enough for graduate school.
- NOT after “such as”
 - INCORRECT: They bought kitchen supplies such as, detergent, paper towels, and garbage bags.
 - CORRECT: They bought kitchen supplies such as detergent, paper towels, and garbage bags.

Comma Practice

Instructions: Insert commas wherever they are needed in the sentences below. For extra practice, include the number of the rule that applies for each example. Sometimes, more than one rule applies!

- The candidate promised to lower taxes protect the environment reduce crime and end unemployment. **Rule #** ____
- If one cannot invent a really convincing lie it is often better to tell the truth. **Rule #** ____
- At the medical examination I was injected inspected and rejected.
Rule # ____
- The optimist thinks that this is the best of all possible worlds and the pessimist knows it.
Rule # ____
- Because politicians never believe what they say they are surprised when others believe them. **Rule #** ____
- I used to live in Fayetteville North Carolina but I moved after August 3 2003 to a new address. **Rule #** ____
- On Christmas Eve is going to marry Adam. **Rule #** ____
- Mark Twain portrayed youthful carelessness in *Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* allowed him to illustrate a developing conscience. **Rule #** ____
- The new clerk the one with the phony eyeglasses and the red rubber nose is a real clown.
Rule # ____
- Old George the caretaker escaped with the family’s jewels. **Rule #** ____
- I fell asleep during the long pointless movie. **Rule #** ____
- I replied “Alligators could never swallow the clown’s car!” **Rule #** ____