

Comma Use Guide

- 1. Introductory words (*placed before the subject of the main clause*)**
Interjections: yes, no, well, why, and oh are followed by a comma
Adverbs: besides, however, anyhow, nonetheless at the beginning of the sentence
- 2. Introductory phrases and clauses (*placed before the subject of the main clause*)**
A participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence is followed by a comma.
Ex: *Hoping to be rescued, they treaded* water all night.
A long adverbial clause at the beginning of a sentence is followed by a comma.
Ex: *When the sun rose in the morning, our sleeping bags were* wet.
A succession of prepositional phrases is followed by comma.
Ex: *Under the rug at the top of the stairs, she found* her necklace.
- 3. Transposed words and phrases**
Words and phrases moved to the beginning of a sentence from their normal position are set off by a comma.
(normal) He usually is dressed in blue jeans. (transposed) Usually, he is dressed in blue jeans.
- 4. Appositives**
Appositives, which give additional identifying information, are set off with commas.
Ex: Farrell, our quarterback, injured his shoulder.
- 5. Words of direct address**
Ex: Gary, please stop humming that song.
- 6. Parenthetical expressions**
Words and phrases used to explain or qualify a statement are set off with commas.
Ex: We'll get back, we hope, in time for the meeting.
Ex: The students, however, did not know this.
- 7. Dates, addresses, geographical names**
Ex: I believe Copper Hills, California, is her home.
Ex: On August 14, 1945, the war with Japan ended.
Ex: He lives at 3144 Weller Road, Phoenix, Arizona 85016, with Dan.
- 8. Nonessential modifiers**
These descriptive phrases and clauses are *not* essential to the main idea of the sentence.
Ex: Lynn, whose favorite color is red, drinks milk. (Think of the commas as handles.)
- 9. Compound sentences**
Comma before the conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) that joins two independent clauses
Ex: Ms. Thomas must leave work now, or she will miss her plane to Chicago.
- 10. Series**
Commas are placed between items in a series (but *not* following the final item).
Ex: Clothing, books, and papers littered the room.
- 11. Coordinate Adjectives**
Between two adjectives that modify the same noun (where "and" would be used).
Ex: The long, dull debate seemed endless. Her short red dress is her favorite.
- 12. Clarity**
Ex: Before waxing, Jill mopped the floor.
- 13. Words omitted**
Ex: Anna baked a pie and Tom, some bread.