

Extra Information Cont.

- An introductory element, such as:
 - A **prepositional phrase***:
From her chair, the psychiatrist took notes.
*The comma may be omitted if the phrase is short (2-3 words)
 - A **participial phrase**:
Listing complaints, the comma grew furious.
 - An **interjection**
Oh, the comma may never find happiness.
 - A **conjunctive adverb**
However, the comma keeps trying.
- An **adverb clause at the start of a sentence**
 - An **adverb clause** is a **dependent clause**, which means it contains a subject and a verb but must be attached to an **independent clause** in order to be grammatically correct
 - **Adverb clauses** are *dependent* because they start with **subordinating conjunctions** (ex: *after, although, because, if, since, unless, whenever, whereas, while, etc.*) and thus cannot express a complete idea
 - **Adverb clauses** serve to provide sentences with details answering questions of *when/where/why/how*
After the session ended, the comma felt better.
Since another patient had an emergency, the psychiatrist rescheduled the semicolon.
- * Only use a comma with an adverb clause that ends a sentence if the clause shows **contrast**:
The comma felt better, although he remained upset.
- A **nonrestrictive relative clause**
 - Relative clauses are either **restrictive** or **nonrestrictive**, are introduced by a relative pronoun (*who, whom, whose, which, that*) or a relative adverb (*when, where, why*), and describe the noun preceding them
 - A **nonrestrictive relative clause** contains extra information about the noun it modifies and therefore is set off by commas:
The comma, who had a rough day, cried.
 - A **restrictive relative clause** contains information necessary to *restrict* the meaning of the noun it modifies and does **not** require punctuation
The noises that accompanied the comma's weeping disturbed the semicolon in the waiting room.

General Tip

When you read your paper aloud, if you hear yourself pause, think punctuation! Readers come to a full stop at a period, but other punctuation influences pace as well. A pause within a sentence *typically* indicates a comma is needed, so if you hear yourself naturally pause while reading your work, you probably need to add a comma. Review the rules in this usage guide to make sure the comma is necessary.

Further Resources

<http://www.chompchomp.com/>

This site serves as an all-around grammar guide and allows you to practice your comma usage with interactive quizzes. If you navigate from the home menu to *Tips & Rules*, you will find seven separate *Comma Tip* handouts.

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/6/>

Purdue Owl is not only a helpful guide for using various citation styles, but also has an entire section devoted to punctuation, including commas.

A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation by Noah Lukeman. ISBN 978-0-393-32980-3.

This book covers punctuation usage with a greater emphasis on style than strict grammatical rules, and may be more helpful to students unfamiliar with technical grammar terms.

— [Compiled by Liz Sullivan] —

CCSU Writing Center
Grammar Guides

Commas



Arkle, Peter. Cartoon. *The New York Times Opinionator* 21 May 2012. Web.

Comma Function

Like all punctuation, commas serve to control the speed readers consume information and to help readers process the text. A comma causes readers to pause and breaks the text into easily absorbed units. When a necessary comma is absent or a comma is inserted improperly, readers struggle to comprehend the text, or they may even completely misanalyze the writer's message. Commas always serve to guide readers, but one of the most challenging aspects of their usage is that some commas are not strictly necessary and can be included or omitted based on style.

Usage Guide

Lists or Series

Commas function to separate items in a series of **three or more**.

_____, _____, and _____

A series may be simple, like a list of nouns or verbs, or more complicated, like a list of phrases or clauses. When a list is complex enough for items within it to require commas, semicolons are used to separate items in the series:

The comma complained about bold fonts, which make him look fat; italicized words, which he thought looked pretentious; and apostrophes, which he felt were always mimicking him.

Compound Sentences

When you think about it, writing is a way of thinking that requires us to organize and record our thoughts to share with readers. We break our ideas into digestible units that build to the more complex notion we aim to convey—for instance, a series of sentences work together to deliver a paragraph's cohesive message. If we break the text down even further, individual sentences often contain **clauses** (a clause is group of words containing both a **subject** and **verb**). An **independent clause** expresses a **complete idea**—thus it can stand alone as a sentence. However, sometimes we do not wish to divide two independent clauses into two separate sentences because they work together to express a cohesive idea. Independent clauses can then be joined to create a **compound sentence**. This is done with either a semicolon or, more frequently, a **comma** and **coordinating conjunction**. There are seven **coordinating conjunctions**, frequently referred to by the acronym **FANBOYS**.

Compound Sentences Cont.

Coordinating conjunctions:

- ◊ For
- ◊ And
- ◊ Nor
- ◊ But
- ◊ Or
- ◊ Yet
- ◊ So

In the following examples, each independent clause's **subject** is underlined, its **verb** bolded, and the comma and coordinating conjunction outlined:

The comma **faced** an identity crisis, **so** he **turned** to several self-help books.

Many people **misuse** commas, **but** the rules **for** usage **are** simple if practiced.

The psychiatrist **worried** when the comma was late, **for** her punctuation cliente **were** always punctual.



Direct Quotations

Commas can serve to indicate when we **directly quote**, that is restate using exact words. Typically, direct quotation utilizes some type of **attribution** (e.g. “he said”) along with commas and quotation marks

• If an attribution introduces a quote, the comma comes *after* the attribution and *before* the quotation marks:

The comma whined, “no one respects me.”

• If an attribution follows a quote, the comma *precedes* the attribution from *within* the quotation marks:

“No one respects me,” whined the comma.

Direct Quotations Cont.

• If the attribution breaks up the quotation, commas are required within the quotation marks preceding it **and** outside the quotation marks following it:

“No one,” whined the comma, “respects me.”

• Quotations are often trimmed down and integrated into the sentence itself, in which case commas are **not** needed:

The comma muttered about “disrespectful writers” and what he’d do if he could only get his hands on their “blasphemous pencils.”

• Commas are also **not** needed for **indirect quotations**, which do not repeat the exact words. Indirect quotes are usually indicated by the word “that” after an attribution:

The comma said *that* his feelings were hurt.

Extra Information

When writing, we often aim to convey more nuanced information than a simple statement that subject x did verb y—we include additional information not strictly necessary for formation of a grammatical sentence. It is *customary* to set off this extra information with commas. **Extra information** can take the form of:

• An **appositive**, which is a word or phrase that essentially renames the noun it follows

The psychiatrist, *a trained medical professional*, consoled the upset comma.

• An **interrupting expression** (e.g. transitional words, commentary)

The comma, *however*, was inconsolable.

• The **name/title of a person/group being addressed**

Doctor, I just can’t take it anymore!

• A **“tag” question** (used to prompt confirmation or denial)

You are going to respect commas now, *right?*