

Comma Rules

Use commas to separate three or more items in a list.

Keep in mind that items can be **nouns**, **verbs**, or **adjectives**.

- I need to buy **kiwis**, **coconuts**, and **limes**.
- This afternoon I'm going to **study**, **work**, and **babysit**.
- The marbles are **bright**, **colorful**, and **round**.

Use a comma to separate a dependent clause from an independent clause.

A **dependent clause** cannot stand alone as a complete sentence, while an **independent clause** can.

- **Whenever I write an essay**, **I get confused about where to put commas**.
- **If the weather is nice tomorrow**, **I'm going to the park**.

Bear in mind that the independent clause must come **first** in the sentence if you use a comma. If the independent clause comes first, a comma is not used:

- **I get confused about where to put commas** whenever I write an essay.
- **I'm going to the park** if the weather is nice tomorrow.

Use a comma to separate two independent clauses when they are joined together by "FANBOYS."

Remember, **independent clauses** are clauses that, alone, form a complete sentence.

FANBOYS: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So

- We have to go to the airport soon, **for** we have a flight to catch.
- I tripped over a rock, **and** I fell into a puddle.
- I do not want ice cream, **nor** do I want apple pie.
- He wants to buy a pair of pants, **but** he has already spent his paycheck.
- We can drive to the beach, **or** we can take a bus.
- It was snowing outside, **yet** the roads were safe to drive on.
- The restaurant was inexpensive, **so** the family ate a lot for dinner.

Keep in mind that commas come **before** FANBOYS.

Use commas to separate nonessential elements within a sentence.

Nonessential elements offer information that is not vital to the sentence.

- My mother, **who owns a blue truck**, drove me to school today.
- Her dog, **strangely enough**, loves the mailman.
- The modern art at the museum was very ugly. **However**, the large marble statues were beautifully carved.
- **On the one hand**, this computer has more features. **On the other hand**, that computer is less expensive.

Use a comma after an introductory element of a sentence.

An **introductory element** is a word or phrase that is not an adjective that comes before the subject in a sentence.

- **Hello**, my name is Steven.
- **Yes**, the cellphone's battery is dead.
- **No**, the marble statue is not modern art.
- **Unfortunately**, the only coffee left is decaf.

Use a comma to indicate a pause or shift at the end of a sentence.

Note that this can also be a **part of the sentence that refers back to the beginning of the sentence**.

- It was warm outside, not hot.
- You're in a good mood today, aren't you?
- The motorist slammed on his brakes, **screaming at the car that cut him off**.
- The dog walked down the street happily, **waving his tail with joy**.

Use commas to set off quotations.

Commas should generally be placed both before and after quotations appear within a sentence.

- "Today is a great day to be outside," exclaimed the merchant.
- According to Francis Bacon, "knowledge is power."

There are a few cases when commas should not be paired with quotation marks. For further information on this, see the Quotation Mark Rules sheet.