

# PUNCTUATION: COMMA RULES

Learning when to and when not to use commas can feel overwhelming. Commas are a necessary part of writing because they make sentences flow better and help the reader grasp meaning. Use this handout as a quick reference guide to the most common uses and misuses of the comma.

## IMPORTANT VOCABULARY

### Commas

A punctuation mark indicating a pause between parts of a sentence. It is also used to separate items in a list and to mark the place of thousands in a large numeral.

### Independent Clause

The shortest and sweetest definition of an independent clause is a sentence. Independent clauses have a subject and a predicate. They can stand alone and still make sense.

### Dependent Clause

Dependent clauses do not express a complete thought. Therefore they can not stand alone. Usually dependent clauses provide independent clauses with extra information.

### Introductory Phrase

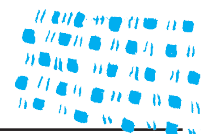
Introductory phrases are dependent clauses that provide background information and/or set the scene for independent clauses.

### Non-Essential Elements

These change the meaning depending on where you put them. Usually non-essentially elements you can take out of your main clause and still have your main idea make sense.

### F.A.N.B.O.Y.S

An acronym for For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So. Keep in mind in this context, of these words indicate a continuation of your sentence in some way shape or form. These words link two independent clauses into one sentence.

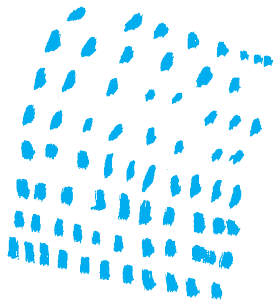


### WHEN TO USE COMMAS

- Introductory Phrases/Clauses/Words
- Before introducing a quote
- Lists
- Before F.A.N.B.O.Y.S. & Independent Clauses
- When including non-essential elements .
- When using two or more coordinating adjectives to describe the same noun.
- Geographical Names, Dates, and Addresses

### WHEN NOT TO USE COMMAS

- After a brief prepositional phrase. (Is it a single phrase of fewer than five words?)
- After an essential appositive phrase. (See our document on appositives.)
- To separate the subject from the predicate. (See the next page.)





## EXAMPLES OF HOW TO USE COMMAS

### Introductory Phrases/Clauses/Words:

Dear Mr. Coogan,  
In order to get over an art block, you must draw every day.  
When lunchtime comes, we will go to Jasmine Deli.  
However, her habit of not paying attention in class caused a lower grade.

### Before or After introducing a quote:

According to Gardner's Art Through the Ages, "INSERT QUOTE."  
"Time to go to school," said mama.  
Scientists from the Minneapolis Institute of Technology expressed their concern over global warming, "QUOTE."

### Lists

My favorite drawing tools are Copic markers, paint pens, and Pentel brushes.  
I'm a fine arts studio major studying drawing, painting, and filming.  
My favorite artists are Ana Mendieta, Frida Khalo, and María Izquierdo.

### Before F.A.N.B.O.Y.S. & Independent Clauses

He didn't have enough money to pay for his art supplies, so he sold some of his things on Free & For Sale.  
She wasn't ready for junior review, nor her internship interview.  
They were sick of eating fast food all the time, yet once again bought McDonald's anyway.

### Non-Essential Elements

My Professor, Tom Garrett, always tells us funny stories in class.  
The Art Cellar, home to hundreds of art supplies, is located inside the Morrison building at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.  
The Learning Center, my favorite place to study, is a valuable resource for students.

### When using two or more coordinating adjectives to describe the same noun

My dog is a happy, little poof ball.  
The printshop professor wore a stained, green apron.  
The funny, smart, charismatic student rode off into the sunset.  
Geographical names, dates, and addresses

### Saint Paul, Minnesota

November 16, 2017  
2501 Stevens Ave. Minneapolis, MN 55404

For more guidance on commas please visit:  
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/1/>  
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/03/>