

Everything You Wanted to Know About the Comma But Were Afraid to Ask

Most comma errors can be avoided by remember a few relatively simple rules. They are as follows:



Commas and Clauses (No, not that kind)

✚ Use a comma to separate to independent clauses that are joined together by a coordinating conjunction.

- An independent clause is a clause that can stand on its own.
I am going to the library.
Jim is going with me.
- The coordinating conjunctions are *and, but, so, yet, or, nor,* and *for*.

Therefore, if you wanted to join these two clauses together with an *and* or a *but*, you would use a comma.

I am going to the library, and Jim is going with me.

OR

I am going to the library, but Jim is going with me.

✚ Use a comma to separate an independent clause and a dependent clause joined by a subordinating conjunction **WHEN** the dependent clause comes first.

- A dependent clause is a clause that cannot stand on its own because it is introduced by the subordinating conjunction.

Because I am going to the library

- Subordinating conjunctions include the words *also, however, consequently, furthermore, likewise, moreover, nevertheless, otherwise, then, thus*

This means that when you introduce a clause with a subordinating conjunction, it becomes a dependent clause, dependent upon another clause to complete the idea that the independent clause has begun. When you begin a sentence with a dependent clause, you should separate it from the independent clause which follows.

- *Because I am going to the library, I won't have time to go to the store tonight.*

However, if we reverse the order of these two clauses, with the independent clause coming first, we don't need the comma.

- *I won't have time to go to the store tonight because I am going to the library.*

✚ Use a comma to set off a type of relative clause known as *nonrestrictive*:

I decided to buy my brother's car, which is red. ("which is red" is not necessary to identify the car that is being bought)

✚ Do not use a comma with a relative clause known as *restrictive*:

I decided to buy the car that is newer. ("that is newer" is necessary to identify which car is being referred to. HINT: "That" always begins a restrictive clause, and there does not require a comma.)

Commas and Phrases

✚ Use a comma to separate a participial phrase from the rest of the sentence:

Running as fast as she could, Andrea tore down the street after the bus.

- ✚ Use a comma after introductory phrases of more than three or four words, as in the following example:

To encourage reflection over the experiences of the week, each person will keep a journal.

Commas and Words

- ✚ Use a comma after an introductory conjunctive adverb, as in the following sentence:

Consequently, I will need to mail my payments by the fifth of each month.

- ✚ Use commas to link more than two items in a series, as shown here:

I decided to break up with my boyfriend because of his disrespect, his poor attitude, and his inherent laziness.

Commas and “Interruptions”

- ✚ Use commas to enclose words, phrases, or clauses that “interrupt” as in the following examples:

Gender, it appears, is much more complicated than we originally thought.

Gender, a much more complicated element than we originally thought, is something that requires a closer look.

Also use commas to set off **conversational expressions**, as in the following examples:

“Well, I’m not sure,” said the former president.

No, you may not leave until your homework is done.

Use commas to mark a contrast. Consider these examples:

Owning a car is a nuisance, not a necessity.

Marilyn had seen a lunar eclipse, but never a solar one.

Finally, use commas to keep ideas clear and distinct inside expressions:

Some critics believe that whatever is, is wrong.

Those who can, do; those who can't, complain.