

COMMA RULES

1- Use a comma to separate items or elements in a series, usually three or more items.

ex.

- I needed eggs, milk, butter, and chocolate chips for the recipe.
- He hit the ball, dropped the bate, and ran to first base.
- Jim won three of the five events in the pentathlon: the mile, the long jump, and the 100-meter.

However, it is optional to include a comma before the “and” and the last item on the list.

2- Use a comma and a conjunction (and, but, for, nor, yet, or, so) to link two independent clauses. An independent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought. It can also stand on its own as a complete sentence.

ex.

- He forcefully hit the ball, and he ran to first base.
- She gave us the questions, but she forgot to give us the answer sheets.

You can also use a semicolon without the conjunction to link related independent clauses.

ex.

- She left to the office right after breakfast; she had to finish the paperwork to start her new job.

3- Use a comma after transition and introduction words or phrases. Introduction words and phrases do not express a complete thought but are used to introduce the main, independent or dependent clause of a sentence. (See underlined parts)

ex.

- Walking through the snowy roads, she slipped and broke her leg.
- By working as a research assistant at the institute, I will be able to gain more experience.
- To find a parking space, you have to come early.
- However, I know I may not be satisfied with the results.

4- Use a comma to separate parenthetical elements. A parenthetical element is a part of the sentence — a phrase — that can be removed without changing the essential meaning of that sentence. (See underlined part)

ex.

- My father, who is sixty, swims a mile every day.
- The Church of the Nativity, which is Located in Bethlehem, is one of the holiest sites for Christians.
- Her father, a professional soccer player, was suddenly diagnosed with cancer.

Do not use a comma when setting off an essential element or part of a sentence that clarifies the thought.

ex.

- The baby wearing the red vest is my daughter.
- The candidate who had the most money won the election.
- Students who plagiarize only harm themselves.

5- Use a comma to set off an adverbial dependent clause. A dependent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought and cannot be a complete sentence. An adverbial clause is one that includes an adverb or a subordinating conjunction (though,

although, because, despite, in spite of, when, since).

ex.

- Although she said she won't be going to the wedding, her sister ended up going with her new boyfriend.
- Because I know you have to hand in the application by the tenth, I will finish the recommendations before January first.
- While working at the gas station, I was robbed.

When using "because," often times you do not need to use a comma if the "because clause" is essential to the meaning of the sentence.

ex.

- He had to leave the class because his teacher asked him to go to the principal's office.

6- Do not use a comma when both a city's name and state's or country's name are mentioned together. In this case, the state's or country's name is treated as a parenthetical element.

ex.

- They visited Hartford, Connecticut, last winter.
- Paris, France, is sometimes called "The City of Lights."

You do not need a comma, when a state becomes a possessed noun.

ex.

- Hartford, Connecticut's investment in the insurance industry is well known.

7- Use a comma to separate coordinate adjectives.

ex.

- She gasped, when she saw her tall, funky and good looking roommate.
- The first time I met Shauna, she seemed like a quiet, sweet, compassionate and caring person.

8- Use a comma when quoting a particular text or recreating dialogue.

ex.

- Summing up her research paper, she said, "Whether the solution is in the teachings of the ancients or those of the moderns, it is out there for teachers to explore and examine in their writing and in their classrooms as they search for what will give students a new outlook on the world."
- "You don't have to listen to everything your father says," Sarah's friend said. "You are not the ten-year-old girl anymore."
- "The question is," said Ali, "whether you can take on fights that mean something to you and others as well."

Do not use commas to set off quoted text preceded by the word "that" or ones that are embedded in a larger structure.

ex.

- In the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire writes that "the word...is no longer an abstraction or magic but a means by which people discover themselves and their potentials as they give names to things around them."
- We often say "Sorry" when we don't really mean it.

9- Use commas to set off phrases that express contrast.

ex.

- Some say the world will end in ice, not fire.
- The kittens were very cute, but very messy.

Watch out for excessive comma usage. Most times, it's best to make two sentences or compress two

independent clauses into one sentence.**COMMA EXERCISES****Place a Comma Where Necessary:**

- 1- By finishing this paper I will officially be a MSc. holder.
- 2- While I was catching the fish my boat capsized.
- 3- I needed eggs and milk to make my daughter's birthday cake.
- 4- Steve wanted to go to the beach but he went to class instead.
- 5- My father who is sixty five has had three heart attacks in the last three years.
- 6- Having finished the test he left the room.
- 7- Cranberries which are my favorite fruit are the main ingredient in this cake.
- 8- All the presidential candidates promise to end unemployment lower taxes reduce crime and reform the healthcare system and social security.
- 9- She is a very sweet girl. Though she didn't know me she gave me a ride to school.
- 10- I saw her run out of the room and I heard a loud bang on the floor.
- 11- My mother has to leave early today she has a doctor's appointment.
- 12- I visited Albany New York last year.
- 13- After surviving the freezing weather and reaching the peak of the mountain they had to climb down.
- 14- "You have to leave now" Sarah said.
- 15- To set up the printer settings you have to insert the CD first.
- 16- Although he graduated first in his class he never had the initiative to work in Wall Street.
- 17- I had to go to school and submit my portfolio to my professor.
- 18- The man who was arrested for the murders is from my neighborhood.
- 19- As a research assistant she did all the testing and experimenting on the new materials in the lab.
- 20- She knows that she will not be able to graduate this year.
- 21- The independent candidate who had the least money lost the election.
- 22- Because of the horrible conditions in the areas torn down by the earthquake the rescuing team had to leave and call for backup.
- 23- She was very lonely yet she could not return to a husband who was abusing her.

Answers:

- 1- By finishing this paper, I will officially be a MSc. holder.
- 2- While I was catching, the fish my boat capsized.
- 3- I needed eggs and milk to make my daughter's birthday cake.
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- 5- My father, who is sixty five, has had three heart attacks in the last three years.
- 6- Having finished the test, he left the room.
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- 8- All the presidential candidates promise to end unemployment, lower taxes, reduce crime, and reform the healthcare system and social security.
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21- The independent candidate, who had the least money, lost the election.

22- Because of the horrible conditions in the areas torn down by the earthquake, the rescuing team had to leave and call for backup.

23- She was very lonely. Yet, she could not return to a husband who was abusing her.

References

<http://ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/commas.htm>