

Using Commas

LISTING

Use commas to separate words and word groups in a simple series of three or more items.

Examples:

- My estate goes to my husband, son, daughter-in-law, and nephew.
- Today I ate a sandwich, some grapes, and a bowl of cereal.

SEPARATING INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

Use commas to separate independent clauses when they are joined by coordinating conjunctions: **for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so** (FANBOYS).

Examples:

- He walked all the way home, *and* he shut the door.
- There was a knock at the door, *but* he was too afraid to answer it.

AFTER INTRODUCTORY CLAUSES, PHRASES, OR WORDS

Introductory Clauses are dependent clauses that provide background information for the main part of the sentence (the independent clause). Common words for introductory clauses include *after, although, as, because, if, since, while*.

An *Introductory Word* is a single word that sits on its own at the beginning of the sentence. Common introductory words include *yes, however, well*.

Examples:

- *Because her alarm clock was broken*, she was late for class.
- *If you are ill*, you ought to see a doctor.
- *However*, you may not be satisfied with the results.

SEPARATING ADJECTIVES

When describing a noun using multiple adjectives and the order of the adjectives is interchangeable, use a comma to separate those adjectives.

Example:

- **Correct:** He is a strong, healthy man. -*or*- He is a healthy, strong man.
- **Incorrect:** We stayed at an expensive summer resort. - *not* - We stayed at a summer expensive resort. (not interchangeable, so no comma)

To determine if a comma is needed, mentally put *and* between the two adjectives. If the result still makes sense, add the comma. *A strong **and** healthy man* makes sense, but *an expensive **and** summer resort* does not.

NONESSENTIAL WORDS, CLAUSES, AND PHRASES

Commas are used to mark words or phrases which may add to the sentence but are not necessary to understand the purpose of the sentence.

Examples:

- That Tuesday, *which happens to be my birthday*, is the only day I am available.

COMMA ERRORS

COMMA SPLICE

Two independent clauses are joined together with only a comma and no conjunctions.

- **Incorrect:** He walked all the way home, he shut the door

Correcting Comma Splices:

- **Method 1:** Separate the sentences by changing the comma to a period.
 - He walked all the way home. He shut the door.
- **Method 2:** Add a coordinating conjunction after the comma: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.
 - He walked all the way home, and he shut the door.
- **Method 3:** Change the comma to a semicolon.
 - He walked all the way home; he shut the door.

INCORRECT USAGE OF COMMAS

- Using a comma between noun clauses in a compound subject or object

Example (compound subject):

- **Incorrect:** *The music teacher from your high school, and the football teacher from mine* are married.
- **Correct:** The music teacher from your high school and the football teacher from mine are married.

Example (compound object):

- **Incorrect:** Jeff told me *that the job was still available, and that the manager wanted to interview me.*
- **Correct:** Jeff told me that the job was still available and that the manager wanted to interview me.

- Using a comma after an independent clause when it is followed by a dependent clause.

Example:

- **Incorrect:** She was late for class, because her alarm clock was broken.
The cat scratched at the door, while I was eating.
- **Correct:** She was late for class because her alarm clock was broken.
The cat scratched at the door while I was eating.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND REFERENCES:

- Commas – GrammarBook: <http://www.grammarbook.com/punctuation/commas.asp>
- Purdue OWL: Commas: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/03/>