

COMMAS

Commas can be difficult to master because we often find ourselves wanting to place them in a sentence when we pause, but not every pause requires a comma. Commas have special purposes and are used to help connect ideas, list things, and create easy-to-follow sentences. It is important to be familiar with basic comma rules and not rely on rhythms of speech. See below for common comma usage.

WHEN TO USE A COMMA	EXAMPLE
To combine independent sentences with a coordinating conjunction.	<i>Sandra was late for class, <u>but</u> she remembered her project.</i> coordinating conjunction
To separate items on a list of three or more items.	<i>The dog knocked over the table, chair, and lamp.</i> <i>The comma before the “and” is commonly called an “oxford comma,” which is used in academic writing.</i>
To separate two adjectives when the word <i>and</i> can be inserted between them.	<i>The player was a quick, agile athlete.</i>
After an introductory phrase	<i><u>Before dinner was even on the table</u>, Jenni started eating the dessert.</i> introductory phrase subject
To find out whether or not a sentence has an introductory phrase, look for the subject of the sentence. If there is anything before the subject, the sentence has introductory material.	<i><u>First</u>, I went to the bank.</i> introductory word
Around nonrestrictive phrases. Nonrestrictive phrases are phrases that aren’t essential to the overall meaning of the sentence.	<i>The office workers, <u>rejecting their manager’s offer</u>, went on strike.</i> nonrestrictive phrase Deciding whether or not to use commas here is dependent on what the writer means. This writer means that all the office workers went on strike, so they used a nonrestrictive phrase, and therefore needed commas. If the writer wanted to restrict the kind of workers that went on strike, they would use a restrictive phrase, and therefore not use commas. This would change the meaning of the sentence to only the workers who rejected their manager’s offer went on strike.
Around appositive phrases, which are nouns or noun phrases that rename a noun nearby.	<i>Donna, <u>my mother’s cousin</u>, is coming for dinner.</i> appositive phrase <i>That boy in the hat, <u>the one with all the freckles</u>, has a cute dog.</i> appositive phrase

COMMA ERROR	INCORRECT	CORRECTION
FRAGMENTS: An incomplete sentence. Usually the result of a missing subject or verb.	<i>There are so many trees in the region. Such as oak, pine, maple, and cypress trees.</i> The first sentence is complete: an independent clause. The second is incomplete: it doesn't have a subject or a verb.	<i>There are many trees in the region, such as oak, pine, maple, and cypress.</i> By connecting these clauses with a comma, the fragment is alleviated.
COMMA SPLICES: two independent clauses (complete sentences) with only a comma between them.	<i>The teacher is here early, she is not happy.</i> Both clauses have subjects, verbs, and objects; therefore, they are independent.	<i>The teacher is here early. She is not happy.</i> The first example breaks the comma splice into two smaller sentences instead of using a comma. For another way to revise this commas splice, see below.
RUN-ONS (Fused sentences): two or more independent clauses (complete sentences) with no punctuation between them.	<i>Carmen loved traveling in Italy she felt Rome was too hot.</i> Both "Carmen loved traveling in Italy" and "She felt Rome was too hot" are complete sentences.	<i>Carmen loved traveling in Italy, but she felt Rome was too hot.</i> Adding a coordinating conjunction with a comma prevents a run-on.

FANBOYS

(coordinating conjunctions)

FANBOYS is a nickname to help you remember coordinating conjunctions: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*. Use these with a comma (,) to join independent clauses (complete sentences). Here is the formula: Although you may see some authors begin sentences with conjunctions, it is generally discouraged in formal writing.

independent clause + comma (,) + FANBOYS" + independent clause

EXAMPLE: I arrived on time, but he had already left.

EXAMPLE: She is the boss, so you should ask her.

You can also use a few of these conjunctions without a comma to join grammatically equal items that are not independent clauses.

EXAMPLE: I like apples and oranges.

EXAMPLE: He was exhausted but not crabby.

