



The Comma

Commas

Used to separate items in a list, connect coordinating clauses, connect modifying clauses, and mark the end of an introductory phrase.

Use a comma when you need to...

separate items in a list of more than two items:

“We did some camping, fishing, and rock climbing on our trip”.

When a writer uses a comma in between the second word in the list and the word *and*, that’s known as an **Oxford** or **serial** comma. This is acceptable in most academic and business writing.

For Associated Press (AP) style, which is the standard for journalism and mass communications, you don’t need a comma between the second to last item and the word *and*:

“We did some camping, fishing and rock climbing on our trip”.

However, sometimes leaving out the last comma can cause confusion:

“I love my parents, Lady Gaga and Humpty Dumpty”.

This could give your reader the impression that your parents, whom you love, are Lady Gaga and Humpty Dumpty, when you really wanted your reader to know that you love Lady Gaga and Humpty Dumpty in addition to your parents.

For AP style, leave out the last comma, but for most other types of writing, include the last comma and avoid confusion.

Use a comma to...

separate adjectives that independently describe a noun:

“We enjoyed a warm, sunny, beautiful afternoon.”

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Use a comma with...

a coordinating conjunction when you connect two ideas in a compound sentence. Coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

“Sam was supposed to be here, but I haven’t seen him all day.”

“She told me to check at the library, so I went there this morning.”

Use a comma...

after the first thought in a complex sentence if the sentence begins with a subordinating conjunction.

Watch for common subordinating conjunctions like the following: if, unless, although, when, while, as, before, after.

“**Unless** you call me, I will expect to meet you at noon for lunch.”

“**Although** I dislike crowds, I enjoyed visiting New York City.”

Use a comma to...

set off interruptions in a sentence, especially if the interruption provides additional information, but the sentence would still make sense without it:

“The weather, **according to the TV forecast**, is going to get worse tomorrow.”

Use a comma...

After an introductory word or phrase or a transitional word or phrase:

“**After using this product**, I will never buy it again.”

“**For about a week**, they didn’t have a signal.”

“**However**, the package never arrived.”

Use a comma to...

Set off nonrestrictive clauses. A restrictive clause drastically changes the meaning of the sentence, whereas a nonrestrictive clause does not change the meaning of the sentence:

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Restrictive clause (no comma)

“Medical equipment uses batteries **that have a long half-life.**” If we remove “that have a long life,” the meaning of the sentence changes dramatically—medical equipment needs specific batteries to function properly.

“Mallory wants an easy book **that she can read on vacation**”.

Non-restrictive clause

“Hospitals need high quality medical equipment, **which can be expensive.**”

If we remove **which can be expensive**, the meaning of the sentence doesn’t change much.

“Mallory wants to buy a book to read on her vacation, **which starts next week.**”

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