

**Why commas matter: Commas are used to help readers understand a sentence as its writer intended. When sentences are missing necessary commas, they can be misinterpreted.**

### Common Comma Uses

- Use a comma when listing items in a series.
- Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction between two full sentences.
- Use a comma between two adjectives that can be joined with *and*.
- Use a comma after introductory thoughts and before a full sentence.
- Use commas before and after a phrase that gives details about or defines a noun.
- Use a comma to set off/identify a quote.
  - Use a comma before the ending quotation mark.
  - Use a comma if the quote is in the middle of the sentence.
  - Use a comma after a signal phrase.

Use a comma when listing items in a series.



Examples:

- Jane likes sausage, mushroom, and pepperoni on her pizza.

*The final comma, the oxford comma, in this sentence is optional. In some cases, you need the oxford comma to preserve meaning.*

- I attended my first class taught by the professor, an activist and playwright.

*In this sentence, the professor is defined as an activist and playwright.*

vs.

- I attended my first class taught by the professor, an activist, and playwright.

*With the oxford comma, this sentence conveys that the class was taught by three people.*

Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction between two full sentences.

Examples:

- Jane loves pizza, *and* John loves cannolis.
- Jane loves pizza, *but* she hates pepperoni.
- Jane loves pizza, *for* it is delicious.



**DON'T** use a comma to connect two complete sentences if there is no coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS). This creates a comma splice.

The seven coordinating conjunctions are:

**F**or  
**A**nd  
**N**or  
**B**ut  
**O**r  
**Y**et  
**S**o

Use a comma between two adjectives that can be joined with *and*.

Examples:

- We love Sal's delicious, cheesy pizza.
- The long, difficult journey was exhausting.



**DON'T** use a comma between adjectives that cannot be joined with *and* such as "two purple sweaters"

Use a comma after introductory thoughts and before a full sentence.

Most introductory thoughts tell when, where, how, or why the action of the sentences takes place.

Examples:

- However, John stops to grab a slice of pizza on his way home.
- To avoid unnecessary stress, I plan to visit the Writing Center for assistance with my assignments.
- Though English is their second language, they continue to work hard and do their best.

Use commas before and after a phrase that gives details about or defines a noun.

Example:

- Pizza, found all over the city, is a favorite lunchtime meal.
- Without phrase: Pizza is a favorite lunchtime meal.

# COMMA BASICS CONTINUED

A quote can appear in the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence. In each case, a comma is used in the following ways:

**Use a comma before the ending quotation mark when it does not end a sentence.**

Example:

- “Every story I create, creates me. I write to create myself,” said Octavia E. Butler.

**Use commas to set off/identify a quote if the quote is in the middle of the sentence.**

Example:

- Jhumpa Lahiri writes, “That's the thing about books. They let you travel without moving your feet,” in *The Namesake*.

**Use a comma after a signal phrase.**

Example:

- Vanessa Mártir **writes**, “It is through language that we find and make meaning of the world.”

**Some signal phrases:**  
*writes, argues, illustrates,*  
*comments, suggests,*  
*claims, cites, etc.*

For more information, see our  
**'Signal Phrases'** handout.

**This guide addresses the most common uses of commas. If you need any more clarification, please visit the Writing Center with a copy of your own writing!**

