The Samuel Rudin Academic Resource Center

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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.

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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.

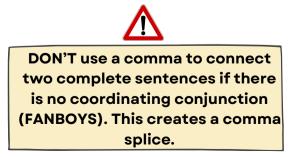
• I attended my first class taught by the professor, an activist, and playwright.

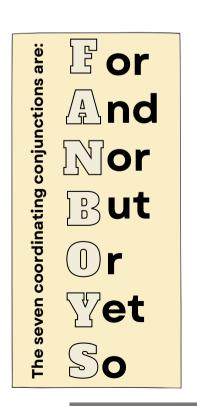
With the oxford comma, this sentence conveys that the class was taught by three people.

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.







Use a comma between two <u>adjectives</u> 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.





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 '<u>Signal Phrases'</u> 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!



