

06.7 Comma Usage

The Comma (,) is used in English to designate a verbal pause in a sentence. These pauses serve to help organize sentences and clauses and make their intended meaning more clearly understood.

Introductory Phrases

Commas are used to set off introductory phrases in sentences. In many cases, these begin with *prepositions*—organizing words—that situation the action of the sentence in time, space, or in logical relation to another idea.

[Intro Phrase], [Independent Clause]

In the middle of the night, I heard a noise.

Because Zoe was late for class, she missed the quiz.

Between fourth and fifth period, Janet had lunch.

After we ordered the pizza, John arrived with a few bottles of soda.

Next to geometry, Alex's favorite subject in school was history.

While Mamie talked on the phone, Ike and Curtis fixed the hole in the drywall.

If you are not going to eat that last slice of pizza, could my daughter have it?

When Eve gets back from the store, we will make the tuna casserole.

During the last few minutes of the movie, a man was snoring loudly in the back row.

Around the corner from Margery's house, there was a deli that served amazing sandwiches.

However, Jason didn't want to go to the ballgame.

Between Independent Clauses Connected with FANBOY Conjunctions

[Ind. Clause 1], [FANBOY Conjunction + Independent Clause 2]

Camille was clearly upset, **but** she didn't exactly know why.

The film was brilliantly acted, **yet** the photography looked amateurish.

John was not watching where was going, **and** he tripped over the books that Janine left in the hallway.

Jessica brought several box lunches to the worksite, **for** whoever might have forgotten theirs.

Franklin didn't have his book, **so** he couldn't do the homework assignment.

It is important for students to check their email, **or** they will miss important updates from their instructors.

Alice had never traveled to western Pennsylvania, **nor** did she really want to.

In "Comment" or "Interruption" Clauses

[Clause 1], [Comment / Interruption], [Clause 2]

Alex's best position, *which was shortstop*, gave him the best chance of a scholarship.

Jamie found her ring, which she had lost the previous week, while she was cleaning the couch.

The dog, sleeping in the corner, heard the noise and picked up his head.

The student, who was always running late, missed the majority of the quizzes in the class.

My brother, who is an architect, designed my new kitchen.

The chef's specialty, veal marsala with wilted spinach and leeks, had earned him accolades all over the city.

Okie Rolensahl, the famed Appalachian documentarian, passed away yesterday at the age of 91.

Between Elements of a Series or List

[List Element 1], [List Element 2], [List Element 3], and [List Element]

Mike Wallace, Harry Reasoner, and Ed Bradley were all well-known members of the 60 Minutes newsmagazine team.

Some problems facing urban universities currently include inadequacy of funding from state and local governments, crumbling infrastructure, falling enrollments, and low class attendance rates.

The engagement party's menu included grilled asparagus, baked salmon with béarnaise sauce, sautéed scallops, and au gratin potatoes.

This morning my wife fed the kids, cleaned the kitchen, and did the grocery shopping, all before I got back from my doctor's appointment.

My priorities for the next year are replacing all the shrubs in the front of my house, renovating my bathroom, and finding some more time to spend with my kids.

The Civil Rights movement in the United States was influenced by leaders like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, John Lewis, and Jesse Jackson.

I had a horrible day on Thursday: I missed my bus, forgot my lunch, lost my glasses, and got a migraine headache.

To Set Off Quotations From the Rest of a Sentence

"I don't really like eggs," Katherine said with a grimace.

"It's time to clean up the room," the preschool teacher announced.

Odetta looked over the newspaper and said, "I can't see any advertisements for cars in this section."

A wise man once wrote that, "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find, that you get what you need."

"If at first you don't succeed," the professor began, "try, try again. Or come to my office and I'll just explain it to you."

Exercise: Identifying Correct Comma Usage

Indicate whether the below uses of commas are correct or incorrect.

1. While, I was eating, John read the paper and looked up movie times. Correct? Y / N
2. "I wonder how long the procedure will take," Markus wondered aloud. Correct? Y / N
3. In the abandoned house the salvage team found a working stove a broken refrigerator, a couch that could be usable, and a lot of bugs. Correct? Y / N
4. Rex who was a prize-winning German Shepherd, was running off his leash at the dog park. Correct? Y / N

5. The little boat, which was tossed and turned by the storm, finally made it into port after a seven hour delay, which was fortunate. Correct? Y / N
6. Although he had never been to the city before, Albert seemed to feel right at home. Correct? Y / N
7. Margaret wanted to ask Sid out but she was nervous, so she didn't. Correct? Y / N
8. The house we bought, the eighteenth one we looked at, was just a bit out of our price range. Correct? Y / N
9. John's car seat stained by a soda he spilled, needed to be cleaned or reupholstered. Correct? Y / N
10. The Three Stooges were named Larry, Curly, and Moe. Correct? Y / N

Exercise: Placing Commas Correctly

Place commas in the correct places in the following sentences.

1. In the last year Pablo really changed his life: he got a new job stopped smoking and lost over 100 pounds.
2. While my wife kept our son busy I put together his birthday present in the basement.
3. I had never seen a silent film before but The Artist really impressed me.
4. Todd Madeline Gary and Megan went to the party with James.
5. Because he had neglected to do the reading Jason didn't do well on the quiz.
6. Paul's foot was bleeding pretty badly yet he managed to finish the race.
7. Until she was chased by a mountain lion Denise did not think she was afraid of anything.
8. The car was a good deal but it needed new tires new brakes a tail-light and an oil change.
9. Although Connor really liked Marissa he was not in love with her so he had to end their relationship.
10. The girls who had just come home from the pool got everything wet as they went into the house and their mother was unhappy.