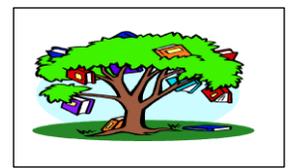


Toward Better Literacy: Reference Outlines



Commas

From a reader's perspective, a comma may be considered a sort of written pause. Proper comma usage depends on several conventions. Be careful not to "over-comma." If it is not needed as per the rules below, just leave it out. The rules below have an "embedded example."

Before a coordinating conjunction

v Use a comma before a FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet and so), but be sure that these conjunctions are not joining a compound noun or verb.

After an introductory element

- ❖ When a sentence begins with an introductory clause or word, use a comma to show where that introductory element ends and the main clause begins.
- ❖ To deal with an infinitive introductory phrase, use a comma.
- ❖ Beginning with a participial phrase, not only use a comma, but be sure that the sentence makes sense. Writing proper introductions, commas still can't write.
- ❖ However, you can write, and write well.

Non-essential elements

v Phrases which provide additional information, meaning that the clause does not change the meaning of the sentence, require a comma before and after the clause. Be careful to find the right noun to agree with the verb.

Separate items in a series

- ❖ Three or more items in a series, list, or enumeration are separated by commas, yet it is not uncommon to drop the comma before the last item.
- ❖ There is no comma or punctuation between two items joined by a conjunction.

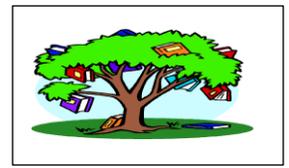
To separate two or more coordinate adjectives that describe the same noun

- ❖ A coordinate adjective belongs exclusively to the noun. Two coordinate, descriptive adjectives, if reversed, would not make sense. If "and" could fit between the adjective/adverb, there is a comma.
- ❖ Never add a comma before the final, descriptive adjective and the noun.

Parallel Items and Tag Questions

- ❖ Parallel items may be condensed, requiring no conjunction. The more students read, the better they write.
- ❖ A comma is required, not preferred.
- ❖ Tag questions use a comma, don't they?

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Before quotations

- ❖ The rule is, “use a comma before the quotation, and put the period before the ending quotation.”

Appositives

- v Appositives, elements that describe or define a person, place or thing, are set off with commas.

Relative clauses (using “that”)

- v Elements that are relative do not need commas.

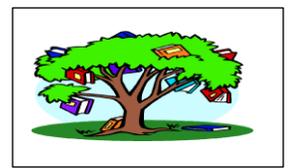
Geographical names

- v The Woodlands, Texas.

Dates

- v July 4, 1776

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Semicolons

are punctuation marks that indicate a pause but are stronger than commas.

Between Two Independent Clauses

- ❖ Semicolons can be used to replace periods, but only between two independent clauses (complete sentences) that relate closely in meaning.
 - The desert known as Death Valley became a U.S. national park in 1994; it used to be a national monument.
- ❖ *Never* use a semicolon between a dependent clause and an independent clause.
 - **NO** Although Death Valley is a desert; its mountain peaks are covered with snow.
 - **YES** Although Death Valley is a desert, its mountain peaks are covered with snow.

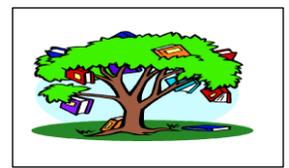
Before a Conjunctive Adverb or Transitional Expression

- ❖ Semicolons can also be used to replace a period between closely related sentences when the second sentence starts with either a conjunctive adverb or a transitional expression.
 - **Conjunctive Adverb**
 - Death Valley gets little rain each year; **nevertheless**, in the spring, its mountains have spectacular wildflower displays.
 - **Transitional Expression**
 - Many plant roots in Death Valley burrow dozens of feet below the surface; **in contrast**, some Death Valley plant roots run only slightly below the surface.

To Separate Items in a Detailed List

- ❖ Use semicolons to separate individual items in a series that contain commas.
 - The animals in Death Valley include **spiders**, such as black widows and tarantulas; **snakes**, such as coral snakes and sidewinders; **and small mammals**, such as kangaroo rats, which can convert seeds into water, and trade rats, which nest around cactus plants.

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Colons

To Introduce a List, an Appositive, or a Quotation

- ❖ Use a colon to introduce a list, an appositive, or a quotation when the words *the following* and *as follows* end an independent clause.
 - **Listed Items:** The students demanded the following: an expanded menu in the cafeteria, improved janitorial services, and more up-to-date textbooks.
 - **Appositive:** Museums in New York own the best-known works from Louis Tiffany's studio: those wonderful stained-glass windows.
 - **Quotation:** The little boy in *E.T.* did say something neat: "How do you explain school to a higher intelligence?"
- ❖ *Never* use a colon when the words you use to introduce a list, an appositive, or a quotation form an incomplete sentence.

Between Two Sentences

- ❖ You can use a colon when a sentence serves as an introduction to a second sentence.
 - We will never forget the first time we made dinner at home together: he got food poisoning and was too sick to work for four days.
- ❖ *Never* use a colon when a direct object consists of a series or list of items.
 - **NO** We bought: eggs, milk, cheese, and bread.
 - **YES** We bought eggs, milk, cheese and bread.
- ❖ *Never* use a colon to separate a dependent from an independent clause.
 - **NO** After the drought ended: water restrictions were lifted.
 - **YES** After the drought ended, water restrictions were lifted.

Between Title and Subtitle

- ❖ *Literature: An Introduction to Critical Reading*

Between Hours and Minutes and Minutes and Seconds

- ❖ The runner passed the halfway point at **1:23:02**.

Between Numbers in Ratios

- ❖ A proportion of **7:1** a **3:5** ratio

After Words in Memo Headings

- ❖ To: Dean Kristen Joy

After Formal Letter Openings

- ❖ Dear Ms. Carter:

Between Bible Chapters and Verses

Psalm 23:1-3