

Comma Use Made Easy

While the comma has many uses, learning these seven rules will help you to use it correctly much of the time.

1. To separate all geographical names, items in dates, addresses, and title in names.

- Geographical Names: Auraria campus gets its name from the town of Auraria, Georgia.
- Items in Dates: May 13, 2009, is my expected graduation day.
- Addresses: The governor lives at 400 East 8th Avenue, in Denver.
- Titles in Names: James Stewart, RN, will see you now.

2. Between items in a series of three or more (no comma is necessary in series of two).

- The restaurant serves fish, chicken, beef, and vegetarian dishes.
Note: the final comma (after “beef”) is optional.
- The restaurant serves Vietnamese and Chinese food.
Note: no comma appears in a series of two items.

3. To separate two or more coordinate adjectives (descriptive words that are of equal importance) that describe a noun.

- The old, rusty car was in need of repair.
- My neighbor is a mean, vindictive fellow.

The key to deciding if you have coordinate adjectives is to ask two questions: 1) Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written in reverse order? 2) Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written with *and* between them? If the answer is yes, you have coordinate adjectives and you need to separate them with a comma.

4. Before any of these seven coordinating conjunctions (the part of speech that connects two equally important parts of the sentence): *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*.

- I read the book, but I did not understand it.
- I went to the store, and then I went home.

5. After introductory words such as *also, however, nevertheless, furthermore, and second*; and phrases that depend on the rest of the

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sentence for their meaning (dependent clauses), like *despite her interest in cars*.

- Introductory Word: Furthermore, President Clinton was voted to a second term.
- Introductory Phrase: Despite her interest in cars, she did not want to become a mechanic.

6. To denote non-restrictive elements (phrases that add additional information) that can occur in the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence.

- Beginning: In New York, my grandfather was a dentist.
- Middle: My grandfather, a dentist, was not pleased to hear that I had stopped brushing my teeth.
- End: My grandfather became a dentist, which took him to New York.

7. To shift from your original words to a quote.

- Ernest Hemmingway once said, “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn.”

8. For more information on how to properly use the comma, see:

Internet Resources:

- Purdue University’s Writing Center website:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_comma.html
- The University of North Carolina’s Writing Center website:
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/commas.html>

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