

# COMMAS...

## When to Avoid Commas

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Commas help to clarify relationships between sentence elements and facilitate understanding. Unnecessary and inappropriate commas can disrupt a sentence's meaning or even confuse the reader.

1. **Do not use a comma if it separates the subject and verb, or the verb and its complement.**
  - a. Example: I wanted to leave him.
  - b. NOT: I, wanted to leave him. And NOT: I wanted, to leave him.
  
2. **Do not use a comma before part of a compound structure that is not a complete independent clause.**
  - a. Example: Her new car was sporty looking and creates a distinguished look.
  - b. NOT: Her new car was sporty looking, and creates a distinguished look.
  
3. **Do not use a comma after a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, so, for, yet*) connecting two independent clauses, but before it.**
  - a. Example: I went to the store, and she went to the movies.
  - b. NOT: I went to the store and, she went the movies.
  
4. **Do not use a comma between two independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction. Use either a period and a capital letter or a semicolon instead.**
  - a. Example: We went to the beach; they went to work.
  - b. NOT: We went to the beach, they went to work.
  
5. **Comma use may be optional when the independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction are short, but you are never wrong to use a comma.**
  
5. **Do not use a comma before the first element of a series.**
  - a. Example: I bought beans, fish, and bananas at the grocery store.
  - b. NOT: I bought, beans, fish, and bananas at the grocery store.
  
6. **Do not use a comma or commas to separate an independent clause from a following dependent clause introduced by *after, before, because, if, since, unless, until, or when* (no comma, whether before or after the subordinating conjunction).**
  - a. Example: I went to class after the writing center.
  - b. NOT: I went to class, after the writing center.
  
7. **Do not use a comma before a clause beginning with *that* or following a *such as* statement.**
  - a. The dress that she wore to the wedding was beautiful.
  - b. The dress, that she wore to the wedding was beautiful.

**8. Do not use a comma or commas to set off essential (restrictive) information.**

- a. Example: The boy who broke the window is at the door.
- b. NOT: The boy, who broke the window, is at the door.

**10. Do not use commas in years, street numbers, zip codes, telephone numbers, or page numbers.**

The following style guides and handbooks were consulted for this handout:

Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. 5th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 235-246.

Kirkland, James W., and Collett B. Dilworth, Jr. *Concise English Handbook*. 3rd ed. Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994. 220-230.

Lunsford, Andrea A. *Easy Writer: A pocket guide*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002. 102-109.

Lunsford, Andrea, and Robert Connors. *The New St. Martin's Handbook*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. 351-367.

Raimes, Ann. *Pocket Keys for Writers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000. 148-151.

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