

## Punctuation > The Rules Of Comma

by Uncle ASAP - Sunday, August 27, 2017

<http://waponpoint.com/punctuation-the-rules-of-comma/>

hello candidates, how are you doing, I hope you are all feeling good. Our topic for today in the use of English language is how to use punctuations, or literally how to use comma in a sentence, i mean, how do you apply all those comma?, the colon, [the apostrophe](#), quotation marks, dash, parentheses, brackets, the ellipsis mark, the slash and the end punctuation, today, we will be elaboratin how to use punctuation marks, so let us not waste anytime.

### Punctuation

First, what are punctuation?

**Punctuation:** are set of symbols and marks which are used to clarify meaning in text by separating strings of words into clauses, phrases and sentences.

### The Comma {,}

**The comma** was invented to help readers understand a sentence or statement even clearly. Without it, sentence parts can collide into one another unexpectedly which will definitely leads to misreading or let just put it as misunderstanding statements. So to prevent this, is what led to the punctuation mark, *the comma*

for example, look at this two sentences:

- a) If you cook Mary will do the laundry.
- b) While we were eating a rattlesnake approached our campsite.

Those two sentences are confusing right? yes, and that is where punctuation marks, the comma, to be precise comes in to save the day.

for the first statement,

If you cook Mary will do the laundry.

at first, starting the sentence, the reader will think that, you are about to cook mary, probably Mary is some kind of vegetables or other food materials, but since will all know that Mary is a name of a person, a female to be precise, then things started confusing, because you will be thinking that how will they cook mary, but what if the name is not mary, let say it a name you have never heard before, and since you don't know the meaning and you are seeing the word *cook* in the sentence, I believe you will quickly assume that we are talking about food here but upon reading statement further, things get even more complicated ..... *will do the laundry*.

let assume mary is truly a vegetable, so the reader start wondering, how will I cook mary and will do the laundry, so it doesn't make any sense.

so adding comma in logical places, will change the moment of confusion to the moment of amusement. Add comma, after **cook and you will get a meaningful statement.**

If you cook, Mary will do the laundry. I believe you understand the sentence now, that is, if you prepare food, someone else will wash the clothes.

something applies to the second statement;

b) While we were eating a rattlesnake approached our campsite.

for the first, you will think, we were eating a rattlesnake, until the part *approached our campsite* polluted the air.

so adding a comma after eating will clear the air.

While we were eating, a rattlesnake approached our campsite.

make sense now, right?

that we were eating at our campsite and a rattlesnake snake approached us.

As you have already know that, in order to prevent you the reader from hurting sentence or statement feelings by your interpretation, some rules are invented to guide you, which should prevent any misreading and speed readers along through complex grammatical [structures](#). just like those rules we stated for [concord](#), for [how to use So](#) in a sentence, those we stated for [noun](#), for the [anomalous verbs: has, have & had](#) for the [tenses](#) and other topics that we have treated in the use of English language. Those rules will be stated now, and later, we'll talk about *When not to use a comma*.

## Rules That Guide The Comma {,} Usage

### Rule 1

#### Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining independent clauses

The rule says, when a coordinating conjunction connects two or more independent clauses, that is, word groups that could stand alone as separate sentences **a comma {,}** must precede it.

There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English language, which are: **for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so.** Yes *The Fan Boys*

A comma tells the reader that one independent clause has come to a close and that another one is about to begin.

for example,

*Nearly everyone has heard of love at first sight, but I fell in love at first dinner.*

**Note:** rarely misused or missing commas. They sometimes recognize that a comma belongs before *a*

**which clause** but not before **a that clause**, [I will explain this better in rule 5].

For all other uses of the comma, after introductory word groups, between items in a series, between coordinate [adjectives](#), around appositive, etc. [please note that, they are unreliable].

When a [grammar checker](#) does note a missing comma, its suggested revision is often incorrect and sometimes even amusing. One program, for example, suggested a comma after the word *delivery* in the following sentence:

**While I was driving a huge *delivery* truck ran through a red light.** Can you see that?

So when reading and looking for grammatical errors, I'll advise you pay more attention to the suggested corrections. I will recommend this [grammar checker](#), we also use it to check grammatical mistakes and typo. The tools rocks. [wanna try it](#) , you should.

### Exception For The First Rule

if the two independent clauses are short and there is no suspect of misreading, in this case the comma may be omitted.

for example:

a) The plane took off and we were on our way.

**Also Note That:** As a rule, do not use a comma to separate coordinate word groups that are not independent clause.

e.g

a) A good money manager controls expenses, and invests surplus dollars to meet futures needs.

in the above example, you'll see that, the word group following *and* is not an independent clauses, that, it is the second half of a compound [predicate](#).

That is on rule one, let go to rule two.

## Rule 2

### Use a comma after an introductory clause or phrase.

The most common introductory word groups are clauses and phrases functioning as [adverbs](#). Such word groups usually tell when, where, how, why, or under what conditions the main action of the sentence occurred. I believe you can all still remember what an adverb is, because we have treated the topic during [this class session](#)

A comma tells readers that the introductory clause or phrase has come to a close or end and that the main part of the sentence is about to begin.

for example:

a) When Linda was ready to cook, her phone rang.

Without the comma, readers may have Linda trying to cook her phone. But the presence of the comma indicated that her phone is the subject of a new clause, not part of the introductory clause.

look at this another example:

a) Near a small stream at the bottom of the canyon, the park rangers discovered an abandoned mine.

In this example, the comma tells readers that the introductory prepositional phrase has come to a close.

### **Exception To Rule 2**

The comma may be omitted after a short adverb clause or phrase if there is no suspect of misreading.

e.g

a) In no time we were at 3000 feet.

sentences also frequently begin with particular phrases describing [the noun or pronoun](#) immediately following them. The comma tells readers that they are about to learn the identity of the person or thing described: therefore, the comma is usually required even when the phrase is short.

e.g

a) Thinking the motorcade drive through Washington was routine, The new President smiled and waved at the crowds.

b) Buried under layers of younger rocks, the [earth's](#) oldest rocks contain no fossils.

**Note:** Other introductory word groups include transitional expression and absolute phrases.

### **Rule 3**

#### **Use a comma between all items in a series**

When three or more items are presented in a series, those items should be separated from one another with commas.

Items in a series may be single words, phrases, or even clauses.

e.g

a) Bubbles of air, leaves, ferns, bits of wood, and insects are often found trapped in amber.

Although some writers view the comma between the last two items as optional, most experts advise using the comma because its omission can result in misreading or ambiguity, that is, having many interpretation or meanings.

for example;

a) My aunt willed me all her property, *houses*, and cars.

from this statement,

Did my aunt will her property and houses and cars or simply her property, consisting of houses and cars?.

in this kind of situation, if the former meaning is intended, a comma is necessary to prevent ambiguity.

But we should all already be aware that, *houses*, *cars* are just distraction, I mean we all know that, all

those are what make the property.

Let me give you another example;

b) The activities include a search for lost treasure, dubious financial dealings, much discussion of ancient *heresies*, and midnight orgies.

Without the comma, the activities seem to include discussing orgies, not participating in them. The comma makes it clear that midnight orgies is a separate item in the series.

## **Rule 4**

**Use a comma between coordinate adjectives not joined with and. Do not use a comma between cumulative adjectives.**

When two or more adjectives each modify a noun separately, *they are coordinate*.

for example;

a) That man is a warm, gentle, affectionate father.

Adjectives are coordinate if they can be joined with and (warm and gentle, affectionate).

Adjectives that do not modify the noun separately are cumulative.

for example;

a) Three large gray shapes moved slowly towards us.

Beginning with adjective closest to the noun *shapes*, these modifiers lean on one another, piggyback style, with each modifying a larger word group.

Gray modifies the word *shapes*, large modifies the group word *gray shapes*, and three modifies *large gray shapes*.

Cumulative adjectives cannot be joined with and (three and large and gray shapes).

## **Coordinate Adjectives**

a) Patients with *severe*, irreversible brain damage should not be put on life support systems.

from the sentence above,

Adjectives are coordinate if they can be connected with and: **severe** and **irreversible**.

## **Cumulative Adjectives**

a) Linda baked a *rich, chocolate*, layer cake.

From the sentence above, Linda does not bake a cake that was rich and chocolate layer, but she baked a *layer* cake that was chocolate, a chocolate layer cake that was rich.

## Rule 5

Use a comma to set off *nonrestrictive elements*. Do not use commas to set off *restrictive elements*.

Word groups describing nouns or pronouns (adjective clause, adjective phrases, and appositives) are restrictive element defines or limits the meaning of the word it modifies and is therefore essential to the meaning of the sentence. Because it contains essential information, a restrictive element is not set off with commas.

### Restrictive Element

e.g

a) For camp the children need clothes that are washable.

if you remove a restrictive element from a sentence, the meaning changes significantly, becomes more general than intended. For example, from the sentence above, the sentence does not mean that the children need clothes in general. The intended meaning is more limited: The children need washable clothes. That is, they need clothes that can be washed.

A nonrestrictive element describes a noun or pronoun whose meaning has already been clearly defined or limited. Because it contains nonessential or parenthetical information, *a nonrestrictive element is set off with commas*.

### Nonrestrictive Element

a) For camp the children need sturdy shoes, which are expensive.

if you remove a nonrestrictive element from a sentence, the meaning does not change dramatically. Some meaning is lost, to be sure, but the defining characteristics of the person or thing described remain the same as before. So from the example sentence, the children need sturdy shoes, and these happen to be expensive.

### Note:

Often it is difficult to tell whether a word group is restrictive or non restrictive without seeing it in context and considering the writer's meaning. Both of the following sentences are grammatically correct, but their meaning is slightly different.

For example;

a) The dessert made with fresh raspberries was delicious.

b) The *dessert*, made with fresh *raspberries*, was delicious.

In the example without commas, that is, the example {a} the phrase made with fresh raspberries tells readers which of two or more desserts the writer is referring to.

In the example with commas, that is, example {b}, the phrase merely adds information about the

particular dessert.

## Adjective Clauses

Adjective clause are patterned like sentences, containing subjects and verbs, but they function with sentences as modifiers of nouns or pronouns. They always follow the word they modify, usually immediately.

Adjective clauses begin with relative pronoun (who, whom, whose, which, that) or relative adverb (where, when).

*Nonrestrictive adjective clauses are set off with commas and restrictive adjective clauses are not.*

### Nonrestrictive Clause

a} John's *house*, which is located on thirteen *acres*, was completely furnished with bats in the rafters and mice in the kitchen.

The adjective clause which is located on thirteen acres does not restrict the meaning of John's house, so in this case, the information is absolutely nonessential.

### Restrictive Clause

a} Linda's *dog*, that just had *puppies* , became defensive around the other dogs in the house.

Because the adjective clause that just had puppies identifies the particular dog, in this case, the information is said to be essential.

**Note:** Use *that only* with restrictive clauses. Many writers prefer to use *which only* with *nonrestrictive clauses*, but usage varies.

## Phrases Functioning As Adjectives

Prepositional or verbal phrases functioning as adjectives may be restrictive or nonrestrictive.

**Nonrestrictive phrases are set off with commas while restrictive are not.**

### Nonrestrictive Phrase

a} The *helicopter*, with its million-candlepower spotlight illuminating the *area*, circled above.

The with phrase is nonessential because its purpose is not to specify which of two or more helicopters is being discussed.

### Restrictive Phrase

a} One corner of the attic was filled with *newspapers*, dating from the turn of the century.

Dating from the turn of the century restricts the meaning of newspapers, so the comma should be omitted.

## Appositives

An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun.

Nonrestrictive appositives are set off with commas while restrictive appositives are not.

### Nonrestrictive Appositive

a) Mary's most important *book*, on the Origin of *Species*, was the result of many years of research.

Most important restricts the meaning to one book, so the appositive *On the Origin of Species* is nonrestrictive and should be set off with commas.

### Restrictive Appositive

a) The *song*, "vertigo," was blasted out of huge amplifiers at the concert.

Once they've read song, readers still don't know precisely which song the writer means. In this case, the appositive following song restricts its meaning.

## Rule Six

**Use comma to set off transitional and parenthetical expressions, absolute phrases, and elements expressing contrast.**

### Transitional Expressions

Transitional expressions serve as bridges between sentences or parts of sentences. They include conjunctive adverbs such as *however*, *therefore*, and *moreover* and transitional phrases such as *as a matter of fact*, and *in other words*.

When a transitional expression appears between independent clauses in a compound sentence, it is preceded by a semicolon and is usually followed by comma. [I will explain this aspect better when we get to semicolon].

for example;

a) Minh did not understand our language; *moreover*, he was unfamiliar with our police.

When a transitional expression appears at the beginning of a sentence or in the middle of an independent clause, it is usually set off with commas.

e.g

a) Natural foods are not always salt free; *celery*, for example, contains more sodium than most people would imagine.

b) As a matter of *fact*, American football was established by fans who wanted to play a more organized game of rugby.

### Exception For Rule Six

If a transitional expression blends smoothly with the rest of the sentence, calling for little or no pause in reading, it does not need to be set off with a comma. Expressions such as **also, at least, certainly, consequently, indeed, of course, moreover, no doubt, perhaps, then, and therefore do not always call for a pause.**

for example;

a) Mary's bicycle is broken; *therefore* you will need to borrow Linda's.

**Note:** The conjunctive adverb *however* always calls for a pause, but it should not be confused with *however* meaning "**no matter how**," which does not;

for example;

However had Bill tried, he could not match his previous record.

### Parenthetical Expressions

Expressions that are distinctly parenthetical should be set off with commas. Providing supplemental information, they interrupt the flow of a sentence or appear at the end as afterthoughts.

e.g

a) *Evolution*, as far as we *know*, doesn't work this way.

b) The base weighed about ten *pounds*, give or take a few ounces.

### Absolute Phrases

An absolute phrase, which modifies the whole sentence, usually consists of a noun followed by a participle or participial phrase. Absolute phrases may appear at the beginning or at end of a sentence. Wherever they appear, they should be set off with commas.

e.g

a) Elvis Presley made music industry history in the *1950s*, his records having sold more than ten million copies.

b) The sun appearing for the first time in a *week*, we were at last able to begin the archaeological dig.

**Note:** *Please do not insert a comma between noun and the participle in an absolute construction.* Use this [instant spelling and grammar checker tool](#) to improve your grammar learning.

for example;

a) The next *contestant*, being five years old, the emcee(master of ceremonies) adjusted the height of the microphone.

### Contrasted Elements

Sharp contrasts beginning with words such as *not*, *never*, and *unlike* are set off with commas.

e.g

a) Unlike *James*, *Linda* loved dance contests.

b) The Epicurean philosophers sought *mental*, not bodily pleasures.

## **Rules Seven**

**Use commas to set off *nouns of direct address, the words yes and no, interrogative tags, and mild interjections.***

for example;

a) Forgive *us*, Dr. *Stephen*, for having rolls with dinner tonight.

b) *Well*, cases like these are difficult to decide.

c) *Yes*, the loan will probably be approved.

d) The film was faithful to the *book*, wasn't it?

## **Rule Eight**

**Use commas with expressions such as *he said* to set off direct quotations**

e.g

a) "Convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than *lies*," wrote philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

b) Naturalist Arthur Cleveland Bent *remarked*, "In part the peregrine decline unnoticed because it is not adorable.

## **Rule Nine**

**Use commas with *dates, addresses, titles, and numbers.***

### **Dates**

In dates, the year is set off from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas.

for example;

a) *On December 12, 1890*, orders were sent out for the arrest of Sitting Bull.

### **Exceptions For Dates**

Commas are not needed if date is inverted or if only the month and year are given.

for example;

a) *December 2010* was an extremely cold month.

b) The recycling plan went into effect on *15 April 2001*.

## **Addresses**

The elements of an address or a place name are separated by commas. A zip code, however, is not preceded by a comma.

e.g

a) Please send the package to Jonathan Chris at 126 spring *street*, *Washington*, IL 61571.

b) Johnson Stone was born in *Johannesburg*, *South Africa*, in 1660.

## **Titles**

If a title follows a name, separate it from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas.

for example;

a) *Sandra Belinsky, MD*, has been appointed to the board of trustees.

## **Numbers**

In numbers more than four digits long , use commas to separate the number into groups of three, starting from the right. In numbers four digits long, a comma is optional.

for example;

a) Three thousand and five hundred: can be written as 3,500 or 3500.

b) Hundred thousand: can only be written as 100,000

c) Six million: can only be written as 6 000, 000

## **Exceptions For Numbers**

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

for example;

It is wrong to write, 1, 23 spring street. ...

or, +234,903,034,30 as in, telephone number.

## **Rule Ten**

### **Use a comma to prevent confusion**

In certain context, a comma is necessary to prevent confusion. If the writer has omitted a word or phrase, for example, a comma may be needed to signal the omission.

e.g

a) The statement, "To err is human; to forgive is divine." can be written in form of;

To err is human; to *forgive*, divine. If two words in a row echo each other, a comma may be needed for ease of reading.

e.g

a) All of the catastrophe that we had feared might *happen*, **happened**.

you know the statement above we sound somehow if it is written without a comma;

All of the catastrophe that we had feared might *happen* **happened**. Sometimes a comma is needed to prevent readers from grouping words in ways that do not match the writer's intentions.

for example;

a) Patients who *can*, walk up and down the halls several times a day.

from the sentence above, the writer's intention was that: Only the patients that can, that is, that have the strength or capable to walk up and down. ....

if the comma is removed, the sentence we have meaning from the start to "*the halls*" upon getting to "*several times a day*", Confusion arises.

Those are the rules to guide you through how to use comma.

let briefly talk about major uses of comma, then we take some examples.

## **Major Uses Of The Comma**

a) **Before a Coordinating Conjunction Joining Independent Clauses** From - Rule One.

*F. Scott Fitzgerald*: No grand idea was ever born in a conference, but a lot of foolish ideas have died there. b) **After An Introductory Clause Or Phrase** From - Rule Two.

*George Orwell*: If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. c) **Between Coordinate Adjectives** From - Rule Four.

*Alexander Woollcott*: All the things I really like to do are either immoral, illegal, or fattening. d) **To Set Off Nonrestrictive Elements** From - Rule Five.

*Igor Stravinsky*: Silence, which will save me from shame, will also deprive me of fame. That's all on our

today's topic "Punctuation - Comma" by now, you should know how to use comma. For better understanding, check our [recommended materials page](#) to get your hands on useful materials to improve your skills. If so, try this exercise and submit your answer through the comments box.

## Questions On Comma

The questions covers all aspects of comma which we have examine above. Add or delete commas where necessary. If a sentence is correct, write "correct " for it but if not, write "wrong" and suggest the correct one. The word in italics, is the targeted words.

- 1} Even though Jackson had studied Nigella Lawson's recipes for *months* he underestimated how long it would take to juice 300 oranges.
- 2} On January 15, *2004* our office moved to 29 commonwealth Avenue, Mechanicsville VA 23111
- 3} "*Yes* dear, you can have dessert," my mother said.
- 4} *Cricket*, which orginated in England is also popular in Australia, *South Africa* and India.
- 5} A member of an *organization*, that provides housing for *AIDS patients*, was also appointed to the commission.

In the example below, detect where to insert comma and insert it or if it doesn't need comma, type "correct".

- 6} I had the pleasure of talking to a woman who had just returned from India where she had lived for ten years.
- 7} The artist painting a portrait of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese civil rights leader, was once a political prisoner himself.
- 8} An ambulance threaded its way through police cars fire trucks and irate citizens.
- 9} For breakfast the children ordered cornflakes English muffins with peanut butter and cherry Cokes.
- 10} After two broken arms three cracked ribs and one concussion Chris quit the varsity football team.

Let stop here on punctuations: comma for today, after reading this topic and understood it, it is recommmed you test yourself by using [this instant spelling and grammar checker tool](#) to improve your performance or simply go to our [Recommended Academic Materials Page](#) to check out all the necessary academic materials. Next class we will talk about [Unnecessary Commas](#). Submit your answer through the comment box and don't forget to suscribe to our candidates mailing list, Thank You.