

Comma Use

1. Use a comma after a dependent clause.

Place a comma after a dependent clause when it precedes an independent clause.

Example If you cook, Elmer will do the dishes.
 While we were eating, a rattlesnake approached our campsite.

2. Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction.

The following words are coordinating conjunctions: for and nor but or yet so
 If an independent clause appears before and after a coordinating conjunction, place a comma before the conjunction.

Hint Circle coordinating conjunctions; then look left and right.

Examples I enjoy reading Steven King, but I do not enjoy watching horror movies.
 The game was over, and the home team beat their rivals.

3. Use a comma to separate items in a series.

A series is three or more words, phrases, or clauses. Separate these items with commas.

Word This restaurant specializes in pasta, steak, salads, and seafood.
 Phrase Recycling centers have been established at the government center, behind the
 high school, and at the baseball fields.
 Clause In order to help business, the manager lowered prices, the sales staff tried to
 be more helpful, and the owner remodeled the store.

4. Use a comma to set off nonessential sentence elements.

A nonessential element can be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence. Identify nonessential elements and set them off with commas.

Hint Rewrite the sentence without the suspected nonessential element to see if necessary meaning is lost.

Nonessential word The governor, surprisingly, opposed the balanced-budget amendment.
 Nonessential phrase You can, of course, join us for dinner.
 Nonessential clause My Grandma Jean, who is fond of knitting, makes a sweater for me
 every Christmas.

5. Use commas to separate quotes.

Commas set off quotations introduced or followed by phrases such as *he said*, *she repeated*, *he argued*, *she insisted*, etc. If a phrase or quote interrupts a single independent clause, commas are used before and after the interrupting thought.

Introductory quote	“Don’t tell me he can’t be held responsible,” retorted the judge.
Ending quote	The lawyer continued to repeat, “My client can’t be held responsible for that.”
Interrupting phrase	“I am sure,” she said, “you will remember our earlier conversation.”

6. Use a comma after introductory elements.

There are several types of introductory elements that could precede a sentence. Commas are used right after the last word of the introductory element. One type of introductory element is conversational expressions such as *No*, *Yes*, or *Well*.