

Comma, Colon, Semicolon

COMMA

1. In a Series – Place a comma between three or more items connected by a coordinating conjunction.
 - **words**
Jones, Smith, and Jackson presented an interesting report.
 - **phrases**
The novel is available in print, on audio tape, and on video cassette.
 - **clauses**
The lawyer argued that the weather was bad, that the car had poor brakes, and that the other driver was speeding.

Caution:

1. **Do not place commas between two items separated by commas or between three items separated from one another by commas.**
 - **Incorrect:**
Jones, and Smith presented an interesting report.
Jones, and Smith, and Jackson presented an interesting report.
 - **Correct:**
Jones and Smith presented an interesting report.
Jones and Smith and Jackson presented an interesting report.

Remember to place a comma before the coordinating conjunction joining the last two elements of the series. Otherwise, the intended meaning of the sentence may not be clear.

Confusing:

He appealed to the administrators, the deans and the advisors.

Are there **three** distinct groups of people
administrators deans advisors

OR

two groups of administrators?
deans advisors

Confusing:

The smooth gray of the beech stem, the silky texture of the birch and the rugged pine capture the eye immediately.

Does this sentence refer to **three** items
the smooth gray of the beech stem
the silky texture of the birch
the rugged pine

OR

two items?
the smooth gray of the beech stem
the silky texture of the birch and the rugged pine

2. **Between Coordinate Adjectives** – Place commas between equal adjectives with no coordinating conjunction between them.

She bought a red, fuzzy coat. (tests work: red *and* fuzzy / fuzzy, red)

Incorrect:

The professor gave a hard, final examination.
(tests do not work: hard *and* final / final, hard)

This is a long, short story.
(tests do not work: long *and* short / short, long)

3. **Before FANBOYS between Independent Clauses in Compound Sentences**

The war lasted for two years, but very few people supported it.

Caution: Do not place a comma between two items with FANBOYS when one item is not a complete sentence.

Incorrect:

The war lasted for two years, but never gathered much support.

Caution:

Do not place a comma after the FANBOY.

Incorrect:

The war lasted for two years but, very few people supported it.

Note:

The comma may be omitted between independent clauses if a sentence is very short.

Acceptable:

The shooting stopped and peace followed.

4. Nonessential Adjective Clauses / Nonessential participial phrases-Separate

unnecessary adjective clauses and participial phrases from the rest of the sentence

Nonessential

adjective clause Mary Jones, who spoke at the meeting today, opposed the merger.

Nonessential

present participial

phrase Mary Jones, speaking at the meeting today, opposed the merger,

OR

Speaking at the meeting today, Mary Jones opposed the merger.

Nonessential

past participial

phrase Mary Jones, frightened by a mouse, bought a cat.

OR

Frightened by a mouse, Mary Jones bought a cat.

Caution: Do not separate **needed** adjective clauses and participial phrases from the rest of the sentence.

Incorrect: The woman, who spoke at the meeting today, opposed the merger.

The woman, speaking at the meeting today, opposed the merger.

The woman, frightened by a mouse, bought a cat.

5. Introductory Elements - Place a comma after certain introductory elements.

A- Long prepositional phrases or a succession of prepositional phrases

Correct: In the solitude of that snowy December night, we became good friends.

At the end of the road on the west side of the train station, an elderly couple sold produce each summer.

Note: With short introductory prepositional phrases, the comma is optional.

Correct: On that night we became friends.

OR

On that night, we became friends.

In December two big snow storms interrupted Bill's daily routine.

OR

In December, two big snow storms interrupted Bill's daily routine.

B- Participial phrases

Speaking at the meeting today, the woman opposed the merger.

Stretching, the cat slowly opened her eyes.

Terrified, the mouse ran behind the cupboard.

C- Gerunds as objects of prepositions

Upon entering the room, the police heard a gun shot.

Incorrect: Entering the room, was dangerous.

(Here the gerund is the sentence subject, not an object of a preposition)

D- Adverbial infinitives

To buy that car, you must pay a \$500.00 deposit.

Note: To test whether the introductory infinitive is adverbial, place "in order" in front of the infinitive. If the resulting sentence makes sense. the introductory infinitive is adverbial and should be followed by a comma.

Test

To buy that car, you must pay a \$500.00 deposit.

In order to buy that car, you must pay a \$500.00 deposit.

6. To separate Interrupters

- A-** Parenthetical expressions and transitions (in my opinion, unfortunately, moreover, of course, unfortunately, as a matter of fact, indeed, for example, etc.)

The meeting was, in my opinion, very productive.
The committee members, however, lacked initiative.
However, the committee members lacked initiative.

- B-** Nonessential Appositives (renamers)

Professor Jones, *my history instructor*, dismissed the class early.

Caution: Do not separate essential appositives with commas.

Correct: My daughter, Jane, is taller than her sisters.

(Here, the appositive is essential since there is more than one daughter.)

My daughter Jane is taller than her sisters.

- C-** Direct Address

Joe, please hand me the newspaper.

You will see, ladies and gentlemen, that I have nothing up my sleeve

7. Nonessential Examples Introduced by such as, especially, particularly

Jones likes to read about dogs, especially Welsh Corgis, in his spare time.
Service professions, such as social work and teaching, offer many non-monetary rewards.

Caution: Do not separate essential examples with commas.

Incorrect: Dogs, such as Welsh Corgis, are expensive.

Correct: Dogs such as Welsh Corgis are expensive.

8. Expressions of Contrast

I want chocolate, not vanilla.
His wife, not his brother, needs the money more.

9. Dates and Addresses

Rule:

When a date or address with several parts occurs in a sentence, place a comma between each element and after the last part.

Correct:

The house at 100 West 67th Street, Baltimore, MD 21210, was sold today.
My son was born on January 5, 1976, in Chicago, Illinois.

Caution:

When the date or address has only one element or has its individual parts separated by words in the sentence, do not use a comma within or after the date or address.

Incorrect:

It was on January 5, that my son was born.
She lives at 100 West 67th Street, in Baltimore.

Correct:

She lives at 100 West 67th Street in Baltimore, Maryland

10. Before Confirmatory Questions

Place a comma between the confirmatory question and the statement that precedes it.

You will be at the party, won't you?

statement confirmatory question

11. Name followed by Jr., Sr., Ph.D., M.D.

Mary Jones, Ph.D., will lecture on insect fragmentation today at 4 p.m.

COLONS

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COLONS

Colons announce. They add dramatic flourishes that introduce lists, quotations, complete sentences, and dialogue.

Colons (cont.)

- Use a colon to introduce a quotation longer than one sentence.
 - The attendant looked straight at us and said: “This ride is not for sissies. It is a high speed thrill ride. You will yell. You will scream. You will cover your eyes and beg for your mommy. If you don’t think you can handle it, get out of line now!”

Colons (cont.)

- Use a colon to end a paragraph that introduces a quotation in the next paragraph.
 - After he won the hotdog eating contest, he prepared to make his speech:
“I trained long and hard for this event,” he began. “I knew the competition would be tough so I had to be tougher....”

Colons (cont.)

- Use colons to introduce questions and answers (interviews).
 - Q: What was your favorite ride?
 - A: Pirates of the Caribbean.

Colons (cont.)

- Use colons to show times.
 - We finished our theme park tour at 1:15 a.m.

Colons (cont.)

- Use colons to show citations.
 - Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 tells us that there is a season for everything.

Colons and Capitalization

- When you use a colon to introduce a complete sentence, capitalize the first word.
 - I have this advice for you: If you are going to tour three theme parks in one day, wear comfy shoes!
 - He had a great idea: The next time we roast hotdogs, we need to make s'mores too.

Colons and Capitalization (cont.)

- When you use a colon to introduce an incomplete sentence, do not capitalize the first word following the colon.
 - Mickey Mouse has two things Mighty Mouse lacks: charm and his own empire.
 - The hotdogs were missing a key ingredient: chili.

SEMICOLONS

[;]

SEMICOLONS:

A semicolon is not quite a comma, not quite a period. It is a break in thought, but not a complete stop... more like an elongated pause.

Semicolons (cont.)

- Use a semicolon to connect independent clauses and avoid run-on sentences or comma splices.
 - We went to Disneyland; we had a great time.
 - He ate six hotdogs; he also got a stomach ache.

Semicolons (cont.)

- Use a semicolon to separate internally punctuated independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction.
 - Skipping the Cinderella parade, which was much too long, we went to The Haunted Mansion; and we were able to walk right on without waiting in line.
 - After finishing those hotdogs, a feat in itself, he got a stomach ache; and then he went to the hospital to get his stomach pumped.

Semicolons (cont.)

- Use a semicolon to separate items in a list that also include commas.
 - Donald Duck brought his favorite lunch: a sandwich, chips, and crackers; his nephews, Huey, Dewey, and Luey; and his favorite girl Daisy.
 - In order to win the contest, John starved himself for two days, Monday and Tuesday; wore extra large clothes, size 42 jeans and XXL shirt; and drank castor oil.

Directions: Insert the proper punctuation marks in the following sections; each section is titled with the punctuation to be used. If the sentence is correct, put a C next to the number in the margin.

Semicolons

1. The last day of summer vacation finally arrived consequently we prepared for the first day of a new year.
2. She was willing to run the fifty-mile race after she soaked in her Jacuzzi for two days.
3. She enjoys ice-skating. She learned how to roller-blade when she was a child.
4. Paula did well in two subjects hence she will have a high average at the end of the year.
5. My mother is a basketball fan thus she has not missed a single home game in the last three years.
6. Today we do not use such comparisons "most unkindest cut of all" Elizabethan plays however contain many double negatives.
7. In the seventeenth century, the era of such distinguished prose writers as Sir Thomas Browne, John Donne, and Jeremy Taylor, the balanced compound sentence using commas and semicolons reached a high degree of perfection and popularity but the tendency of many writers today is to use a fast-moving style with shorter sentences and fewer commas and semicolons.
8. The three top seniors in this year's class have the following four-year averages: Marvin Chan, 94.8 Ruth Ann Cummins, 93.6 and Joan Dorf, 92.8.

Colons

1. The applications for employment at the manufacturing plant asked the following questions: How old are you? Have you ever worked in manufacturing plant before? What other jobs have you held?
2. Don't miss the following items that will be on sale during the first week in June: ice skates, skis, snowshoes, parkas, ski pants, mittens, etc.
3. When she went to camp, she had to take blankets, sheets, toilet articles, a flashlight, and poison ivy lotion.
4. Our school board provides the students with free books, book covers, a notebook cover, notebook paper, yellow pads, and one pencil every six weeks.
5. Here are the four main uses of the comma: (1) to prevent misreading; (2) to separate items in a series; (3) to set off expressions that interrupt the sentence; and (4) to set off introductory phrases and clauses.
6. The graduate was nervous about leaving for college; she felt safe, secure, and happy in her hometown.
7. The reasons for the success of the play are obvious: it has fine actors, witty dialogue, and tuneful music.

Comma

1. Stars sparkle brighter on crisp winter nights.
2. A robot cannot do your housework, walk, or lift huge loads.
3. Hedgehogs look like porcupines but they are related to moles.
4. Jeremy prefers to cook shellfish for they are easy to clean.
5. Fastening cushions on top of seats they made chairs easier to sit on.
6. For exhibiting their porcelain they had joiners make cupboards.
7. For great hunting maps write to Dr. John Filson U. S. Geological Survey 12201 Sunrise Valley Drive Reston VA 22092.