# Comma Usage

# What is a comma?

A comma is a form of punctuation that is used in writing to represent how we speak. When we talk, we naturally slow, pause, and interject. Commas, however, can be the most confusing form of punctuation because we often do not know when it is appropriate to use them in formal writing. Often it is helpful to read aloud, sentence-by-sentence, in attempt to hear the natural pauses and interjections. However, simply relying on this technique can be misleading. It is best to confirm the placement of commas with a rule. There are six main uses for commas:

1. To separate items in a series
2. To set off introductory material
3. Before and after words that interrupt the flow of a thought in a sentence
4. Before two complete thoughts connected by a coordinating conjunction (FANBOY)
5. To set off a direct quotation from the rest of the sentence.
6. For certain every day material

These are the most common, below is a full list of comma usage rules and examples

**Use commas between items in a series.**

1. Words
2. Phrases
3. Clauses

**Series examples:**

1. Bring your notebook, pen, and textbook to class every day.
2. You can remove the cover, adjust the drive belt, and replace the cover with just one tool.
3. We cannot decide what information we will store, how we will retrieve it, or how it will be used.

**Use commas in coordinate situations.**

1. Independent clauses with conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
2. Independent clause with a semicolon and conjunctive adverb (therefore, however, thus, etc.)
3. Adjectives (only if they are reversible)

**Coordinate examples:**

1. You must set the dial, and the ready light must be visible.
2. The storm pounded against the shutters; however, no windows were broken.
3. It is an efficient, inexpensive unit.

**Use commas after introductory elements in a sentence.**

1. Nouns of address
2. Mild interjections (oh, well, my, etc.)
3. Group of prepositional phrases
4. Participle words and phrases
5. Infinitive phrases
6. Subordinate clauses (when, if, after, since, because, while, etc.)
7. Absolutes
8. Transition words or phrases (in summary, in conclusion, as a result, etc.)

**Introductory examples:**

1. Thomas, the door is still open.
2. Well, I didn’t like the conference.
3. In a rush of anger without a second thought, he destroyed the experiment.
4. Referring to the char, you will note the clear results of our research.
5. To install the storm door, remove the packing material and the trim.
6. After he retyped the memo, Carl sent it to his boss.
7. Headlights piercing the fog, the ambulance continued its course.
8. First of all, I want to explain the controls.

**Use commas to set of interrupting elements.**

1. Nouns of address
2. Appositives
3. Contrasting elements
4. Describing (but not necessary) phrases
5. Describing (but not necessary) clauses
6. Absolutes
7. Parenthetical expressions

**Interrupting examples:**

1. In some cases, Mr. Jones, this rule helps.
2. The printer, a tractor mechanism, uses a simple control.
3. The software, not the hardware, is the problem in this case.
4. The printed text, displayed with or without the coding, is usable for editing.
5. The line number, which apply in most cases, have little value in this situation.
6. Matty McDougal, her fist clenching in anger, wanted only to be left alone.
7. The program, admittedly, is weak in some areas.

**Use commas in standard places.**

1. Between and after parts of addresses in a sentence (not with ZIP Codes)
2. Between and after parts of dates in a sentence
3. To set off the direct words of a speaker.
4. In a business letter after the close
5. In a personal letter after the opening and the close
6. Between and after titles in a sentence
7. In an alphabetic list of names
8. To change a statement into a question
9. In numbers

**Standard examples:**

1. He was born in Phoenix, Arizona.
2. He won the race May 17th, 1903, after many years of training.
3. Tom said, “That’s not true.”
4. Sincerely,
5. Dear Matthew, Your friend,
6. William Phold, Jr., is the only son of William Phold, Ph. D.
7. Graves, Debbie
8. Teresa is the boss here, isn’t she?
9. 421,226,500

# Exercise

**Demonstrate your understanding of comma usage by adding commas these sentences.**

1. After the movie my family and I went out for ice cream.
2. I had eggs toast and orange juice for breakfast.
3. James the renowned procrastinator tried to finish his homework on the bus.
4. I said to him “Don’t ever speak to me again.”
5. Karen grew up in Albuquerque New Mexico.
6. I enjoy dancing so I will go with you to the party.