

Commas

The comma is the most common mark of punctuation. It groups words that belong together in your sentence, so it's a great asset to your readers.

1. Add a comma after a long introductory phrase to a sentence:

- *After I return from King Henry's hunting grounds, I will write my novel.*
- *On February 29 we enjoyed our session on punctuation*

2. Add a comma before a tag or a contrast at the end of a sentence:

- *It was a good party, wasn't it?*
- *My parents treat me like a child, not an adult.*

3. Place a pair of commas around words or phrases that are added as explanations or qualifications in the middle of a sentence:

- *Once she returned from the meeting, however, her mood changed for the worse.*
- *Six people, if we include the author, will be attending the conference.*
- *On July 25, 2006, we are driving to Atlanta, Georgia, for the RWA conference.*
Compare: *In July 2006 we drove to Atlanta.*

4. If a sentence has two independent clauses (short sentences) joined by a connecting word (and, but, or, nor, yet, for, so), add a comma before that word:

- *The president arrives at noon, and the meeting will begin after the reception.*

If both parts of the sentence have the same subject, however, delete the comma:

- *The author arrives at noon and will begin the meeting after the reception.*

5. Use commas to set off non-essential, or non-restrictive, word groups or clauses:

- *The third chapter, which I wrote over the weekend, is fifty pages long.*

Do not use commas with essential, or restrictive, word groups or clauses:

- *The chapter that I wrote over the weekend was fifty pages long, but the one I write tonight will be much shorter.*

6. Use commas when the adjectives describe each the noun:

- *I ordered a large, square, frosted cake for the pajama party.*

Don't use commas when the adjectives describe each other, not the noun:

- *I ordered a rich chocolate cake for the pajama party.*

7. Use commas to introduce direct quotations:

- AJ replied with his usual excuse, "If only I had the time."

Compare: *John replied with his usual excuse that he did not have the time.*

Don't use a comma if the quoted words or clauses are the object in the sentence:

- AJ's usual excuse was "If only I had the time."