



COMMA BASICS

What Is a Comma?

A comma is a punctuation mark that helps separate ideas in a sentence. Commas make your writing easier to read and understand by showing where to pause and how ideas are connected.

Why Are Commas Important?

Commas:

- help prevent confusion
- show relationships between ideas
- improve clarity and flow

Without commas, sentences can be difficult to read or may have a different meaning.

Comma with Coordinating Conjunctions (FANBOYS)

Use a comma before coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) when connecting two complete sentences (meaning each sentence has a subject and verb).

Example: Students are busy, but they still find time to study.

Comma After Introductory Words or Phrases

Use a comma after introductory or lead-in elements such as words, phrases, or clauses.

Examples:

- First, students should review the assignment.
- After studying for several hours, students often need a break.
- Because students are busy, they must manage their time carefully.

Commas in a Series (Lists)

Use commas to separate items in a list.

Example: Students need time, focus, and motivation to succeed.

Comma with Dependent Clauses

When a dependent clause comes at the beginning of a sentence, use a comma after it.

Example: Although the assignment was difficult, the students completed it.

When the dependent clause comes at the end, a comma is usually not needed.

Example: The students completed the assignment although it was difficult.

Comma with Nonessential Information

Use commas to set off extra information that is not necessary to the main meaning of the sentence.

Example: My instructor, who teaches English, assigned the essay.

Common Comma Mistakes

Comma Splice:

Connecting two complete sentences with only a comma is incorrect.

Example: Students are tired, they need more sleep.

Fixes:

Students are tired, so they need more sleep.

OR

Students are tired. They need more sleep.

Missing Comma After Introductory Phrase:

Incorrect: After studying for hours students felt tired.

Correct: After studying for hours, students felt tired.

Overusing Commas:

Incorrect: Students, need, to manage their, time carefully.

Correct: Students need to manage their time carefully.

Tips for Using Commas Correctly

- Use commas to separate ideas, but avoid overusing them
- Look for introductory phrases at the beginning of sentences
- Check for lists and add commas between items

- Make sure commas are not incorrectly joining full sentences
- If you can split the sentence into two complete sentences, you may need a comma with a connecting word (and, but, so, etc.).
- If you add a comma + a conjunction (and, but, so, etc.), make sure both sides are complete sentences.

Final Takeaway

Commas help guide your reader through your writing. When used correctly, they make your sentences clearer and easier to understand.