

Using Commas

When Combining Related Sentences

Let's say you have two sentences, and since they are closely related, you would like to combine them into one sentence. Connect them using a comma and one of the seven coordinating conjunctions: *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so* (also known as the "FANBOYS"). Here are some examples:

1. I was skeptical and afraid, but I decided to take this course anyway.
2. Yesterday was her brother's birthday, so she took him out to dinner.
3. He explained the assignment in detail, yet they still didn't seem to understand.

When Placing a Dependent Clause before an Independent Clause

A dependent clause is a group of words that might look like a sentence, but isn't. Here's an example: "Because her alarm clock broke." The statement may look like a sentence, but it is actually an incomplete thought. To make sense, it must be connected to an independent clause, which is a complete thought. If the dependent clause comes first, connect it to the independent clause with a comma. If it comes after the independent clause, connect it without any punctuation. Here are some examples:

1. Dependent clause in front (comma): Because her alarm clock broke, she was late to class.
2. Dependent clause in back (no comma): She was late to class because her alarm clock broke.
3. Dependent clause in front (comma): If you are ill, you ought to see a doctor
4. Dependent clause in back (no comma): You ought to see a doctor if you are ill.

Every dependent clause starts with some word like *after*, *although*, *because*, *before*, *though*, *if*, *since*, *until*, *when*, or *while*, among others. Use such words to help you spot dependent clauses and connect them properly to complete thoughts.

When Listing Three or More Things or Actions

When making a list longer than two items, use a comma between each item. Also, use *and* before the last item. Here are some examples:

1. The constitution establishes the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government.
2. Joey walked into the room, sat down, took out his books, and shook his head.
3. The best things in life are laughing with family, meeting new friends, and eating ice cream.

After Mild Interjections and Introductory or Transitional Words and Phrases

Place a comma after an introductory or transitional word or phrase at the beginning of a sentence. Also, use a comma after a mild interjection like *well* or *yes*. Here are some examples:

1. Having trained harder than ever, the Seahawks won the Super Bowl.
2. Therefore, Lex concluded that Superman must be eliminated.
3. No, I don't think that is correct.

To Separate Extra Information

Sometimes you want to add some extra information or description to a sentence. However, the information isn't essential to the sentence's meaning and either interrupts the flow if it comes in the middle of the sentence

or feels tacked on if it comes at the end. Use a comma on both sides of extra information in the middle of a sentence, and place a comma before any extra information tacked on the end. Here are some examples:

1. Janet van Dyne, known as the Wasp, can shrink to the size of a bug, which is really cool.
2. Fred, who often cheats, is just harming himself.
3. My dad, Mauricio “Shogun” Rua, made his living as a mixed-martial arts fighter, not a chef.
4. Gustavo stayed home because he is sick, not because he didn’t want to come.

In Writing Place Names, Dates, Addresses, and Titles

Commas are used to set off names of states and countries following names of cities, years following dates, the items in an address (except for the postal code), and academic titles following names. Here are some examples:

1. Birmingham, Alabama, gets its name from Birmingham, England.
2. July 4, 1776, is an important date.
3. The President lives at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC.
4. Rachel B. Lake, MD, will be the principal speaker.

Between Adjectives of the Same Category

Adjectives generally fall into the following categories of description: opinion, size, age, shape, color, origin, material, and purpose. Separate adjectives from the same category with commas, but don’t use commas to separate adjectives from different categories (“Commas”). Here are some examples:

1. I have a fantastic, stupendous, marvelous shirt.
2. Bruna has French, Moroccan, and Brazilian ancestry.
3. Your hairy brown English goat has stopped producing milk!
4. Sven showed me the jewel of the Viking museum: an ancient wooden raiding ship.

When Writing Dialogue

When quoting someone or writing dialogue, use commas to separate attributive phrases like *he said* or *she wrote* from the material in quotation marks. Here are some examples:

1. Dorothy said, “I’ll see you tomorrow.”
2. “A witty saying,” claimed Voltaire, “proves nothing.”
3. Bower writes, “The current tensions between the two countries are a result of a botched trade deal.”

Work Cited

“Commas and Adjectives.” *Khan Academy*, www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar/parts-of-speech-the-modifier/adjective-order-and-commas-with-adjectives/v/commas-and-adjectives. Accessed 18 July 2019.

This handout was created by the Writing Centers at YVC.
Yakima Campus, Glenn-Anthon 125 | Grandview Campus, Grandview Main 101
Visit us at the [Writing Center’s homepage](#).

