

BEGINNING GUIDE TO CORRECT COMMA USE

INSERT COMMAS BEFORE COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS *FOR, AND, NOR, BUT, OR, YET, SO* (FANBOYS) BETWEEN 2 INDEPENDENT CLAUSES.

- Class was over, **so** the students went to the bus stop.
- The student asked a question about her writing, **and** the tutor helped her to answer it.
- School is in session, **but** the nice weather has caused some students to miss class.

SEPARATE LISTS OF THREE OR MORE WORDS, PHRASES OR CLAUSES WITH COMMAS.

- Tomorrow I will need my **calculator, graph paper, and pencil** for the test.
- This weekend **I studied, cleaned my apartment, and went out to dinner** for a friend's birthday.

(Semicolons are used in the place of commas when making a list that includes commas within the items in the list: The sister cities of Santa Barbara, California include Toba City, Japan; Yalta, Ukraine; and Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.)

USE COMMAS TO SEPARATE INFORMATION.

Geographical names:

- I was born in **Mexico City, Mexico**.

Items in dates (except the month and day):

- Americans celebrated the United States' bicentennial on **July 4, 1976**.
- This year Independence Day will be on **Wednesday, July 4th**.

Addresses (except the street number and name):

- Jake lives at 152 **Palm Road, Santa Barbara, CA**.

Titles with names:

- **Larry Trout, Ph.D.**, will give a presentation today.

IN DIALOGUE OR WHEN USING A QUOTATION, USE A COMMA BETWEEN THE MAIN DISCOURSE AND DIRECT SPEECH.

- The instructor told the students, "Please come to class on time."
- "Reading to children," the author of the article **writes**, "is of greatest importance."
- In "The Allegory of the Cave" Plato **asserts**, "In the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort."

USE COMMAS TO SEPARATE EXTRA INFORMATION THAT IS NOT ESSENTIAL TO THE MEANING OF THE SENTENCE.

*Use a comma before and after extra information that tells you something more about the noun, but is **not necessary** information (called non-restrictive modifiers):*

- I am enjoying my astronomy class, **which meets on Mondays and Wednesdays**, because we spend some time outside.
- I'm going to a coffee shop with Julia, **my older sister**, to study for our English Placement Exam.

*DO NOT use commas when the information is **necessary** to understand the meaning (called restrictive modifiers):*

- The students **who arrived late** were marked absent.
- Robert Frost's poem "**The Road Not Taken**" is a popular work in American literature.

COMMAS ARE ALSO USED IN INFORMAL SPEECH AND ASIDES.

With parenthetical expressions:

- I have to get to class, **where we're going to learn about commas.**

To signal a shift in tone, extreme pause, or with a contrasting phrase:

- She doesn't need more flour to finish the cake, **just more sugar.**

When adding a question to a sentence:

- "I'm going to the party, **aren't you?"**

When using "yes" or "no":

- **"Yes,** I'm going."

Name or title in direct address:

- **"Sam,** don't forget the snacks."

INSERT COMMAS WHEN USING COORDINATE ADJECTIVES—ADJECTIVES THAT ARE EQUALLY RELATED TO THE NOUN—TO DESCRIBE A NOUN.

Coordinate adjectives "cooperate" in describing a noun:

- Students who graduate from SBCC often have **successful, enjoyable** careers.
- West Campus has a **large, damp** lawn.

Non-coordinate adjectives do not require a comma. You can tell you have non-coordinate adjectives if one adjective is more closely related to the noun than the other:

- Many local residents attend the **nearby community** college.
- Writing Center tutors wear name tags on **bright red** lanyards.

 *Use the following questions to test which type of adjectives you are using. If you answer "yes" to either question, you have coordinate adjectives and need a comma between them:*

- Can the adjectives be used in reversed order and not change the meaning?
- Does the sentence make sense if you place the word *and* between the adjectives?

USE COMMAS AFTER INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION.

Additional words that might signal an introductory clause: while, although, if, instead, when, since, because

- *Clause:*
Because of all of the services it offers, the CLRC is a popular place on campus.

Additional phrases commonly used as introductory phrases: as a result, of course, in addition, in other words, for example, on the other hand

- *Phrase:*
For example, at the CLRC students can receive tutoring in a variety of academic subjects and have access to computers to research for or write their papers.

Additional introductory words: thus, nonetheless, therefore, conversely, however, also, finally, otherwise, instead

- *Word:*
Also, the Media Center is a useful part of the CLRC, and houses audio and video resources students need for some courses.