

## COMMAS THAT FOLLOW RULES

Some commas always go in the same places. You don't need to think about them too much. You just need to follow the rules.

### Use commas between items in a series

Tomorrow I will need my calculator, graph paper, and pencil for the test.

*This includes a series of two or more adjectives.*

Students who graduate from SBCC often have successful, enjoyable careers.

*It does not include a series of adjectives if they modify each other. (You can tell that adjectives modify each other if you cannot change their order, or if you cannot insert the word "and" in between them and have the sentence still make sense.)*

Writing Center tutors wear bright red lanyards.

### Use commas to separate direct quotations from the rest of the sentence.

"Reading to children," the author of the article writes, "is of greatest importance."

*(But not to separate paraphrases or quotations integrated into your own sentence.)*

The author of the article argues that "reading to children is of greatest importance."

### Use commas with dates

This year Independence Day will be on Wednesday, July 4, 2012.

### Use commas following the greetings and closings of letters

Dear Marlene,  
Yours Sincerely,

### Use commas with addresses

Jake lives at 152 Palm Road, Santa Barbara, CA

### Use commas with people's titles or degrees

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

### Use commas with long numbers

1,000,000

### Use commas to set off words of direct address

"Sam, don't forget the snacks."

### Use commas to set off the words yes and no

"Yes, I'm going."

### Use commas to set off mild interjections

"Well, I guess that is that!"

### Use Commas to tag sentences (ones that have short questions at the end)

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

*There are so many different ways of using commas that a list of all the different ways they are used—the usual format for punctuation resources—can be overwhelming. We find it helpful to recognize that some commas go where they do simply because they are following rules, while others help readers find their way around sentences.*

## COMMAS THAT HELP STRUCTURE SENTENCES

These commas help readers understand what is happening in a sentence. They require more thought and understanding of sentence structure.

When considering how to structure your sentence and where to put commas, keep in mind that the subject and the verb are the core of your sentence. Sentences are easier to read when those two parts are kept close together. Commas help separate this core from other parts of the sentence, most frequently at the beginning, and show when it is being interrupted.

### Use commas to set off INTRODUCTORY ELEMENTS

*These may be dependent clauses, phrases, or words.*

Because it offers so many services, the CLRC is a popular place on campus. (clause)  
For example, at the CLRC, students receive tutoring in a variety of academic subjects. (phrase)  
Also, the Media Center houses the video resources that students need for some courses. (word)

*(Although if the element is five words or fewer and it would not interfere with clarity to do so, this comma may be left out.)*

### Use commas set off INTERRUPTIONS

*These may be inessential modifiers, (dependent clauses, phrases, or words)*

I am enjoying my astronomy class, which meets on Mondays and Wednesdays, because we spend some time outside.(clause)  
My assignment, a compare-contrast essay, was not as hard as I thought it would be. (phrase)  
We emerged, finally, into the light. (word)

*transitional expressions,*

I was afraid I might fail that class. I think, however, that I will end up doing really well in it.

*parenthetical expressions,*

He will, no matter how much he denies it, make a wonderful chef.

*or contrasting comments.*

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

*BUT if the modifier is essential, you should not use commas to set it off.*

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

### Use commas to separate independent clauses from each other only if they are followed by FANBOYS.

*FANBOYS stands for for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.*

Class was over, so the students went to the bus stop.  
The student asked a question about her writing, and the tutor helped her answer it.

*See our "Building Complex Sentences" handout for more information and other options for joining independent clauses.*

*There are so many different ways of using commas that a list of all the different ways they are used—the usual format for punctuation resources—can be overwhelming. We find it helpful to recognize that some commas go where they do simply because they are following rules, while others help readers find their way around sentences.*