

COMMAS: FOUR BASIC USES

Coordinator

Use a comma before **and, but, or, for, nor, so,** and **yet** when they connect two independent clauses (full sentences) that could stand alone.

The cook got sick, **but** dinner was served anyway.
Ryan studied hard, **so** he thinks he's prepared for the test.

Introducer

Use a comma after one or more introductory words that come before your main sentence:

When she saw her grade, she was glad.
On the other hand, some research supports this claim.
However, I outran her.
Bill, when are you going to call your brother?
Tripping on the cat, he fell and hit his head.

Series

Use commas to separate two or more adjectives only if you can reverse their order:

He picked up the **crabby, crying** baby
He picked up the **crying, crabby** baby
He picked up the **little black** dog (no native speaker would say **black little** dog)

Use commas to separate three or more items in other series:

She likes to ski, snowboard, and kayak.
On the quad were students going to class, teachers walking to their offices, and toddlers being wheeled to daycare.

Insertter

Use commas at the beginning and end of words or groups of words that could be removed from a sentence without changing or confusing its meaning:

Logan, **in fact,** passed the test.
Bonzo, **the monkey that went into space,** ate a banana.
Kelly and Kim, **however,** dropped the class.
Reading, **it is generally believed,** has many benefits for children.

Some Common Misuses of the Comma

Do not use a comma between two groups of words which could stand alone as full sentences (independent clauses). Consider using a period or semicolon instead.

(wrong) We could go fishing on Saturday, you could borrow a pole from my neighbor.

(right) We could go fishing on Saturday; you could borrow a pole from my neighbor.

Do not use a comma between a subject and a verb.

(wrong) The gorilla sitting in the corner of the cage, thumped his chest.

(right) The gorilla sitting in the corner of the cage thumped his chest.

Do not use a comma before **therefore**, **however**, or **moreover** as a way of joining two groups of words which could stand alone as full sentences (independent clauses). Instead, put a semicolon before the “however” and a comma after it.

(wrong) The steak was perfect, however the potatoes were cold.

(right) The steak was perfect; however, the potatoes were cold.

Practice

Insert, remove, or replace commas if appropriate.

1. The plates are on the bottom shelf and the forks are in the drawer.
2. They live in the big, red house.
3. Registration starts next week, I'm taking Biology 101.
4. His temperature moreover is still over 102 degrees.
5. Beating the second-place winner by ten seconds Shannon won the race.
6. Tyler who was angry about the test left class early.
7. Unfortunately, he was late for work.
8. The soldier to whom I sent the package, never got it.
9. She went to Florida for spring break, however she didn't go to Disney World.
10. She saw hand-made quilts giant pumpkins and fat rabbits at the fair.

Answers

1. The plates are on the bottom shelf, and the forks are in the drawer.
2. They live in the big red house.
3. Registration starts next week; I'm taking Biology 101.
4. His temperature, moreover, is still over 102 degrees.
5. Beating the second-place winner by ten seconds, Shannon won the race.
6. Tyler, who was angry about the test, left class early.
7. Unfortunately, he was late for work.
8. The soldier to whom I sent the package never got it.
9. She went to Florida for spring break; however, she didn't go to Disney World.
10. She saw hand-made quilts, giant pumpkins, and fat rabbits at the fair.