

Commas in Compound Sentences

- **Use a comma before the coordinating conjunction that joins the two independent clauses of a compound sentence.**

Ida Lewis jumped into her rowboat, **and** she headed due east.

Use a comma before the conjunctions *yet* and *for* when they join independent clauses.

Lewis feared the worst, **yet** she hoped for the best.

She was worried about the victims, **for** the water was cold.

Do not use a comma to separate the verb phrases of a compound predicate.

Lewis **jumped into her rowboat and quickly headed due east.**

COMPOUND PREDICATE

Make sure you use both a comma and a conjunction between independent clauses. Using a comma without a conjunction will result in a run-on sentence. *and*

It was the middle of winter, **the** water was extremely cold.

For more about run-on sentences, see p. 120.

1 Here's the Idea

Commas make writing clearer by separating words, ideas, and other elements in sentences.

Commas in a Series

In a series of three or more items, use a comma after every item except the last one.

The items in a series may be words, phrases, or clauses.

Rocks, snags, and shoals can be hazardous to boats.

The boat **hit a rock, took on water, and sank into the sea.**

We do not know **when the boat sank, where it was headed, or who was aboard.**

No commas are needed if the items in a series are joined by *and*, *or*, or *nor*.

The sea was dark **and** deep **and** menacing.

Use a comma after the introductory words *first*, *second*, and so on when they introduce items in a series.

You'll pass three landmarks on the way to the island: **first,** the lighthouse; **second,** Star Point; and **third,** Lil's Landing.

Use commas between two or more adjectives that modify the same noun.

A thick, damp fog blanketed the coastline.

How do you know when to add commas between adjectives?

Here's How Adding Commas Between Adjectives

The captain issued orders in a **low tense** voice.

1. First, switch the order of the adjectives and insert the word *and* between them.

The captain issued orders in a **tense and low** voice.

2. Add a comma if the meaning of the sentence has not changed, AND the word *and* sounds natural between the adjectives.

The captain issued orders in a **low, tense** voice.

In general, don't use commas after numbers and adjectives of size, shape, and age.

five small boats

a **big** yellow moon

a **round** nylon cushion

the **old** stone lighthouse

Commas with Nonessential Material

► **Use commas to set off nonessential clauses and nonessential participial phrases.** Both of these sentence parts add information to a sentence, but the information is not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Advanced Lifesaving, **which is an excellent course,** prepares students to be lifeguards. (NONESSENTIAL CLAUSE)

Mrs. Lewis, **worried about her daughter's safety,** paced nervously on the shore. (NONESSENTIAL PARTICIPIAL PHRASE)

► **Use commas to set off nonessential appositives.**

A **nonessential appositive** is a word or a phrase that adds information about a noun or pronoun.

Scientists transformed the H.M.S. *Challenger*, **a British warship,** into a floating laboratory.

An **essential appositive** is not set off with commas.

Rachel Carson's book *The Sea Around Us* helped raised public awareness of ocean pollution.

For more information on essential and nonessential material, see pp. 69 and 95.

Commas with Interrupters

► **Use commas to set off a parenthetical expression.**

A parenthetical expression provides explanatory or supplementary information that is closely related to the sentence.

Beebe did **of course** keep a journal.

He took notes **I believe** on several previously unknown species.

Common Parenthetical Expressions

after all	furthermore	I suppose	nevertheless
by the way	however	in fact	of course
for example	I believe	moreover	therefore

► **Use commas to set off words of direct address.**

Words of direct address are names, titles, terms of respect, and phrases used to address an individual directly.

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Commas with Introductory Elements

- ▶ **Use a comma after an introductory word or a mild interjection at the beginning of a sentence.**

No, our crew was unable to call for help.

Eventually, a ship spotted us.

Hey, what's that in the water over there?

- ▶ **Use a comma after an introductory prepositional phrase that contains one or more additional prepositional phrases.**

In the spring of 1930, marine science took a giant step forward.

For the first time in history, a scientist explored the ocean's depths.

A single prepositional phrase at the beginning of a sentence may be set off by a comma if it is followed by a natural pause when it is read out loud. Don't use a comma if the phrase is very short or if you would not pause after saying it.

At first they didn't know what they would find.

- ▶ **Use a comma after a verbal phrase at the beginning of a sentence.**

To make the half-mile dive, scientists and engineers designed a deep-sea vehicle.

- ▶ **Use a comma after an introductory adverb or an adverb clause at the beginning of a sentence.**

Fortunately, the vehicle worked well.

When scientist William Beebe made the first dive, he was amazed by what he saw.

Do not use a comma after a phrase or a clause that is the subject of a sentence.

To survive at such depths is difficult.

What he saw amazed him.

Commas in Dates, Place Names, and Letters

- ▶ **In dates, use a comma to separate the day of the month from the year.**

April 15, 2003 November 1, 1960

Don't use a comma when only the month and the year are given.

December 1945

When a date is part of a sentence, use a comma after the year.

On October 1, 1975, a ship was lost at sea.

- ▶ **Use a comma to separate the name of a city or town and the name of its state, province, or country.**

Dallas, Texas Bancroft, Ontario Mexico City, Mexico

When an address is part of a sentence, use a comma after each item. Do not put a comma between the name of a state and the ZIP code, however.

Please forward my mail to 4795 Seaside Drive, Manisota, Florida 36006.

- ▶ **Use a comma after the salutation of a friendly letter and after the closing of a friendly or business letter.**

Hello Aunt Lucy, Dearest Charlie, Dear Mrs. Oliver,

Love, Yours truly, Sincerely,

Commas with Names and Numbers

- ▶ **Use a comma between a personal name and an abbreviation that follows it, such as *Jr.*, *Sr.*, or *M.D.* Also use a comma between a business name and an abbreviation, such as *Inc.***

Lara Johnson, M.D. Paradise Cruises, Inc.

When names and abbreviations are part of a sentence, set off the abbreviations with commas.

Paradise Cruises, Inc., has hired Lara Johnson, M.D., as its medical director.

Commas to Avoid Confusion

- **Use a comma to separate words or phrases that might be misunderstood when they are read.**

Here are four ways commas can clear up confusion in your sentences.

1. Use a comma before the conjunction *but* or *for* when it may be mistaken for a preposition.

Confusing The victims were grateful for the young woman had saved their lives.	Clear The victims were grateful, for the young woman had saved their lives.
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2. Use a comma after an introductory adverb that could be mistaken for a preposition.

Confusing Inside the boat was in good condition.	Clear Inside, the boat was in good condition.
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3. Use a comma to separate a short introductory verbal phrase from the noun that follows it.

Confusing While rocking the boat almost capsized.	Clear While rocking, the boat almost capsized.
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4. Use a comma to separate repeated words.

Confusing What an "old salt" is is an experienced sailor.	Clear What an "old salt" is, is an experienced sailor.
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- **Use a comma to indicate the words left out of parallel word groups, or word groups that repeat the same structure.**

In this situation, the comma takes the place of the verb.

The captain was old; the crew, young.

David ordered lobster, and Connie, softshell crabs.

- **In numbers of more than three digits, use a comma after every third digit from the right. ZIP codes, phone numbers, years, and house numbers are exceptions to this rule.**

3,000 people

3491 Chestnut Ridge Road (NO COMMA)