



Comma Usage

Introduction

Definition of a Comma: a punctuation sign (,) that, unlike the period (.) ending a sentence, signals a slight pause followed by continuation.

A Comma – Uses

1. After an Introductory Dependent Clause (-ing, -ed, before/after/when...):

- Still sleeping, Rosa did not hear the alarm clock.
- Angered by her behavior, Tiffany's parents grounded her.
- After we finished dinner, we put on a DVD.

Note If both parts make sense as separate sentences, DO NOT put a comma; use a semi-colon (;) instead.

Example: Tiffany's parents had to ground her (independent part 1); **she had been behaving outrageously** (independent part 2).

2. After a Transitional Word (therefore, then, however):

- Alex works three jobs. Therefore, he has no time for a hobby.
- The guests were shown the terrace. Then, they went to see the pool.
- Roberto studied very hard for the test. However, his score was low.

3. Before FANBOYS (For-And-Nor-But-Or-Yet-So):

- We left home very early, for we had to be at the airport two hours prior.
- Tim was doing homework, and his younger sister Emma was drawing.
- We didn't feel like eating, nor did they offer us a treat.

- The Sarkisian's planned to go to the beach, but it started pouring.
- The tourists had to check out at noon, or the hotel was going to charge them extra.
- Vera is not good at biology, yet she dreams of becoming a doctor.
- Only three students signed up for the class, so the department cancelled it.

4. In-between Three or More Items in a List, Including Before Final And/Or:

- This semester, Cathy is taking pre-calculus, expository writing, beginner French, and social psychology.
- The flight attendant offered us coffee, tea, juice, or water.

Note When the last two items describe/expand on the first one, NO comma is needed before “and” or “or.”

Example: The old lady lived with her two cats, Dino and Arthur. Let’s pick one color, red or blue.

5. Separating Non-restrictive Clauses, Non- essential Information, or Interjections (alas, God forbid):

- Ms. Lancaster, who teaches French, has spent a year at the Sorbonne.
- My uncle Rob, a big soccer fan, is visiting us this weekend.
- You should buy a fire extinguisher in case, God forbid, there is a fire.

Note If the who clause is restrictive, or contains essential info, NO commas are needed. e.g. The lady who is smoking a cigarette is our French teacher Ms. Lancaster.

6. Separating Salutation/Address at the Beginning, the Middle, or the End

- Dear Ms. Barrone, We would like to invite you to our annual conference.
- You have to work very hard, my students, if you want to be successful.
- Did you hear anything, Emile?

7. After Introducing/Separating Direct Quotes:

- Famous First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”
- “You have to believe in yourselves,” the motivational speaker insisted, “and only then great things start happening.”

Exercise 1- Insert the Commas: Below there are fourteen sentences that are missing their commas. Read each sentence carefully and insert the comma(s) where needed:

1. Anzur’s father wanted him to have a high-paying career: a doctor a lawyer a computer specialist or a business executive
2. Since they had very little money they couldn’t afford to eat out.
3. Did you understand me my friend or should I make myself clearer?
4. All the movies at the theater seemed very boring so Manuel decided to go to the soccer game instead.
5. The famous Shakespearean comedy begins “All the world’s a stage.”
6. Finally Jacqueline received her PhD.
7. Tim who is vegan puts almond milk in his coffee.
8. When we lived in that seaside town, we would wake up early every morning eat breakfast pack our towels head to the beach and stay there till lunchtime.
9. When Marcus started his new job he rented an apartment in the city.
10. Dear Ms. Volpe We are delighted to let you know that you have been accepted into our program.
11. He doesn’t have a college degree yet he has the highest earnings in the company.
12. “I have a dream” Martin Luther King said in his speech “that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”
13. This college is pretty expensive. Furthermore it is too far away.
14. The Joneses our neighbors have a very big house.

Exercise 2- Correct or Incorrect: Below there are ten sentences. Some of them have a correct (C) use of comma(s), whereas others- incorrect (INC). Read each sentence carefully, determine whether it is correct or incorrect, write C or INC in the space next to it, and fix it:

1. People, who make you laugh even in the worst of circumstances, are my favorite to be around.
2. The Mastrogiacomos had to leave early, for they needed to pick their children from kindergarten.
3. The couple standing over there are my cousin's parents, Uncle Tim, and Aunt Angie.
4. The students had to pick Spanish, French, German, or Italian for the foreign language requirement.
5. Jude's brother who has a PhD in cultural anthropology has a very hard time landing a job.
6. Initially, the student-teachers are not allowed to teach classes by themselves.
7. You need to get here as soon as possible, Jason!
8. Veronica takes on a lot of extra-curricular activities, she wants to be accepted into a prestigious college.
9. Chopping onions, Charlene accidentally cut herself.
10. At this point, there are only two things we can do, rent the house, or sell it.