

RULES FOR USING COMMAS

Here are seven of the most important comma rules.

Rule #1 – Lists

Use commas to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses written in a series/list.

Example: *I drove home, cooked dinner, and got ready for the party.*

Rule #2 – Compound sentences

Use commas to separate independent clauses when they are joined by any of these seven coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS): *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*

Example: *He needed some cash, so he went to the ATM.*

Rule #3 – Establishing information

Use commas after introductory a) clauses, b) phrases, or c) words that come before the main clause.

Example: *To be honest, I didn't like the movie.*

Example: *According to the Bible, Joshua was the son of Nun.*

Rule #4 – Extra information

Use commas to set off clauses, phrases, and words that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence. Hint: if you read the sentence without the words in between commas, the sentence should still make sense.

Example: *Dr. Yang, a pediatrician, completed his check-up.*

Example: *I drove the car, which belonged to my brother, to the mechanic.*

Rule #5 – Dates, numbers, and places

Use commas to properly punctuate dates, numbers, and places.

Example: *He was born on August 3, 1999.*

Example: *The United States is a country of approximately 300,000,000 people.*

Example: *July 4, 1776, is known as the day America won independence.*

Note: The year in the sentence above is extra information (See Rule #4). Without the year, the sentence would read: *July 4 is known as the day America won independence.* This is also a complete sentence.

Rule #6 – Quotes

Use commas to introduce certain quoted material.

A comma must be used to introduce a quote if the quote is an independent clause.

Example: Walt Whitman demonstrates his carefree attitude when he proclaims, "I wear my hat as I please, indoors or out."

However, a comma is not used if the quote is a dependent clause.

Example: He considers himself above societal norms, wearing his hat "indoors and out."

Rule #7 – Coordinate adjectives

Use commas to separate two or more coordinate adjectives that describe the same noun. Be sure not to add an extra comma between the final adjective and the noun itself or to use commas with non-coordinate adjectives.

Coordinate adjectives are adjectives with equal ("co"-ordinate) status in describing the noun; neither adjective is less than (subordinate to) the other. You can decide if two adjectives in a row are coordinate by asking the following questions:

- Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written in reverse order?
- Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written with *and* between them?

If you answer yes to these questions, then the adjectives are coordinate and should be separated by a comma. Here are some examples of coordinate and non-coordinate adjectives:

- Scrooge was a cold, unfeeling man. (coordinate: use a comma)
- He wore a large wool sweater. (non-coordinate: do not use a comma)
- The boys crawled into the decrepit school building. (non-coordinate: do not use a comma)
- I winced at the bright, piercing light. (coordinate: use a comma)