



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.