

Using Commas



Correct Use of Commas

1. Commas should be used to separate items in a list.

Examples:

His favorite desserts are chocolate pudding, apple pie, peach cobbler, and ice cream.

Monika wore a red, blue, purple, and white dress.



Oxford Comma

We use a comma before the final 'and' to avoid confusion between the last two items in the list.

Examples:

His favorite desserts are chocolate pudding, apple pie, peach cobbler and ice cream.

Without a comma after cobbler, it might seem that 'peach cobbler and ice cream' is one of his favorite desserts, as opposed to 'peach cobbler' and 'ice cream' being two separate favorites.



Correct Use of Commas

2. Commas should be used before these conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so, to separate two independent clauses.

Examples:

She was a fantastic cook, but she would never be as good as her mother.

He had toothache, so he called the dentist.



Correct Use of Commas

3. Used to separate an introductory phrase or clause from the rest of the sentence.

Examples:

Given the terrible weather conditions, the crew of the yacht were lucky to complete the race.

As the last ray of sun disappeared, Yasmine ran in the door for dinner.



Correct Use of Commas

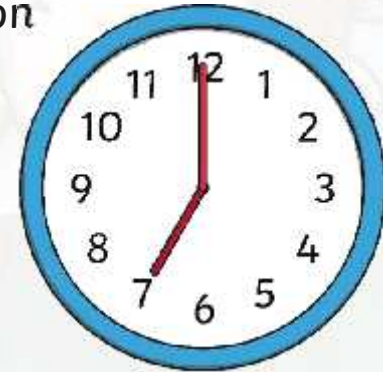
4. Used to indicate a nonrestrictive clause.

This phrase is sometimes known as an interrupting clause. A non-restrictive clause in a sentence adds information and can be removed without changing the meaning.

Examples:

Milan, the funniest boy in the class, was often late for school.

PBS, based in Virginia, is a popular children's TV channel.



Correct Use of Commas

5. Commas should be used to separate direct speech from the rest of a sentence.

Examples:

“Martina,” called Mom, “it’s time to leave for school.”

“Stop right there,” the man commanded. “This is private property.”



Direct Speech with No Comma

A comma is not always needed in direct speech if another punctuation mark is used to separate the speech from the rest of the sentence.

Examples:

“Give me the money!” he snarled.

“Where have you been?” asked Dad.

Incorrect use:

“Give me the money!,” he snarled.

“Where have you been?,” asked Dad.



Correct Use of Commas

6. Commas should be used to separate main and subordinate clauses.

Examples:

While you're waiting, you can read a magazine.

Although I love football, swimming is my favorite sport.



Correct Use of Commas

7. Commas should be used to separate elements in a sentence that express contrast.

Examples:

He thought the building was enormous, but ugly.

She enjoyed the music in the show, not the acting.



Correct Use of Commas

8. Commas should be used to separate dates, years, towns, etc.

Examples:

I grew up in Orlando, Florida.

My grandma was born on March 25, 1942.



Incorrect Use of Comma Splices

Comma splices occur when two independent clauses are joined by a comma. Comma splicing is inaccurate and should be avoided.

Example:

Julian usually gets along with everybody,
he is an understanding person.



Incorrect Use of Comma Splices

Instead of a comma splice, the writer could use:

A Semicolon:

Julian usually gets along with everybody;
he is an understanding person.

A Period:

Julian usually gets along with everybody.
He is an understanding person.



