

Comma Rules

Introductory Words, Phrases and Clauses

The following rules apply to words, phrases, and clauses placed at the beginning of the sentence prior to the independent clause.

Example: Afterwards, the band members went out for pizza.

Diagram labels: "introductory word" above "Afterwards"; "complete subject" above "the band members"; "complete predicate" above "went out for pizza"; "independent clause" above the entire sentence.

1. Place commas after introductory words that should be followed by a distinct pause, such as after adverbs and after mild interjections.

Examples: Slowly, Marshall approached the halfway mark in the marathon. *introductory adverb*
Oh, I understand. *interjection*

2. Place commas after long introductory prepositional phrases (more than four words).
Commas are optional after short introductory prepositional phrases but not required.

Example: After two hot and exhausting days, Alejandro reached the oasis. *comma*

After two days Alejandro reached the oasis. *comma is optional but not required*

3. Place commas two or more introductory prepositional phrases.

Example: With the appearance of a dog in the classroom, students giggled.

With a bark the dog wagged his tail. *comma is optional but not required*

4. Place commas after participial or infinitive phrases at the beginning of sentences when these phrases do NOT function as a noun.

Participial phrase: a verb ending in "ed" or "ing" followed by a modifier

Example: Working carefully, the carpenter made no mistakes. *adverbial phrase modifying "made"*
Skilled and prepared, the carpenter made no mistakes. *adjectival phrase modifying "carpenter"*

Infinitive phrase: "to" + a verb followed by a noun, adjective, or adverb

Example: To prepare well, sand the cabinets before painting.
To prepare the cabinets, sand before painting.

Caution: Phrases with "ing" words and infinitives sometimes function as nouns. These types of phrases should not be followed by a comma.

Example: Working carefully is always a good idea. To work carefully is a good idea.

no comma above "Working carefully"; *no comma* above "To work carefully"

Introductory Words, Phrases, and Clauses Continued...

5. Place commas after introductory words or phrases when needed to avoid confusion.

Examples: Alongside the ice cream, bowls were laid out in rows.

In this sentence, ice cream and bowls are two separate items. A comma adds clarity.

Alongside the ice cream bowls, were spoons and napkins.

This sentence, however, refers to ice cream bowls as a type of bowl. A comma adds clarity.

End of Sentence Tags

Rule: Use a comma to set off a “tag” question added at the end of a sentence to imply a yes or no response is desired.

Example: We are going to the park today, aren't we?

Comma Practice: Introductory Words and Phrases and “Tags”

Directions: Place commas in the sentences where needed. **Some might need two commas!**
Write “C” to the left of the sentence if it is correct and no commas are needed.

- _____ 1. However he tried to use the bottle opener it wouldn't work.
- _____ 2. However he tried the can opener and was successful wasn't he?
- _____ 3. Having chosen medical research as a career Susan enrolled in many science courses.
- _____ 4. Choosing a career in medical research was the best decision Susan ever made.
- _____ 5. From the bleachers on the football field came the sounds of a cheering crowd.
- _____ 6. Wow Juan did a great job on the art exhibit didn't he?
- _____ 7. While choosing your courses consider how much work you are willing to do.
- _____ 8. Nevertheless Miguel did not want to meet him.
- _____ 9. Wanting to visit the university Mazen drove up to the school on the weekend.
- _____ 10. Wanting to visit the university was Mazen's reason for driving to the school.
- _____ 11. Yes Ebony was correct when she guessed the first time.
- _____ 12. Before the movie is the best time to buy your popcorn.
- _____ 13. Before he can get ready for work each day Maximus must get his children ready for school.
- _____ 14. Having decided to eat only healthy foods he gave up all his favorite treats.
- _____ 15. To estimate the costs Madison consulted a repairman by phone.
- _____ 16. To succeed in politics is not necessarily desirable.
- _____ 17. Making up his mind quickly Patel ordered while we were still reading the menu.
- _____ 18. With Michael Jackson went to the concert. (Michael and Jackson are two different boys.)

Write your own sentences with introductory elements and punctuate them correctly.

- 19. After _____
- 20. To save _____
- 21. If _____
- 22. Hearing _____

Comma Practice: Introductory Words and Phrases and “Tags”

Directions: Place commas in the sentences where needed. **Some might need two commas!**
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- _____ 2. However, he tried the can opener and was successful, wasn't he?
- _____ 3. Having chosen medical research as a career, Susan enrolled in many science courses.
- C 4. Choosing a career in medical research was the best decision Susan ever made.
- _____ 5. From the bleachers on the football field, came the sounds of a cheering crowd.
- _____ 6. Wow, Juan did a great job on the art exhibit, didn't he?
- _____ 7. While choosing your courses, consider how much work you are willing to do.
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