

Commas

Incorrect uses of commas:

-Joining two actions in a sentence, but not joining two complete sentences.

I will start the assignment tomorrow, but will not finish it then.

-Before a prepositional phrase – not to be mistaken for an appositive!

I was going to go to the new store, in the mall, but it was closed.

-Joining only two items with a coordinating conjunction

I need to get more bread, and milk.

-When the main clause comes before the dependent clause

They were making dinner, while their friends were driving over.

Using commas after introductory phrases:

- Dependent clause (cannot stand alone as complete sentence) precedes main clause
While I was asleep, it snowed outside.
- Long prepositional phrase – more than 2 – 3 words – needs to be followed by a comma
In addition to my midterms, I also have to write an essay.
- Participial phrase (“-ing” form is the present participle of a verb)
Speaking of the weather, have you noticed how rainy it’s been?
- Nonessential appositive: noun or pronoun giving additional information about another noun or pronoun and can often consist of a phrase with nouns and modifiers; nonessential because it’s not integral to the meaning of the sentence
A woman of many talents, she was skilled in the arts and in mathematics.
- Infinitive phrases (verb left in “to” form)
To reiterate my point, it’s important to use commas after introductory phrases!

Using commas with coordinating conjunctions:

- Any time you connect complete sentences with a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, for, so, yet, nor)
He went to the store, and she went back home.
They were elated, for finals week had drawn to a close.
I do not know the answer, nor do I know how to begin.
- Listing three or more nouns, phrases, or clauses (with last item connected with and/or)
I need to get apples, eggs, and bread.
I will study for the test, go for a walk, or clean my apartment.

Using commas to set off nonessential information:

- If information does not change the meaning of the sentence, it is nonessential
My friend John is a computer science major.
John, a friend of mine, is a computer science major.

Using commas to separate coordinate adjectives:

- Coordinate adjectives modify a noun in the same way
It was a cloudy, dreary day outside.
- Non-coordinate adjectives modify a noun based on different things
The water was a brilliant turquoise hue.

Using commas at the end of the sentence:

- Use commas before contrasting information
I’m not a fan of that color, although it can look okay in certain contexts.
- Use commas when adding additional information that introduces a pause
The song gave her a strange feeling, almost a melancholy nostalgia.
- Use commas when including a phrase referring to something earlier in the sentence
The fruit sat untouched in a bowl on the counter, slowly getting overripe.