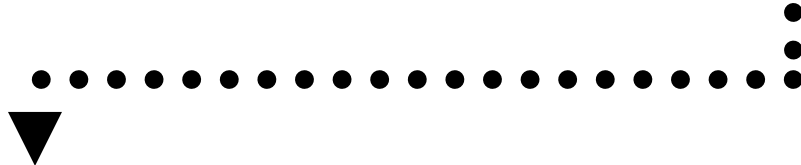


COMMA TIP 1



Use a comma to separate an introductory element from the main clause that follows.

Main clauses¹ will often have single words, phrases, or other clauses that introduce them. In the table below are common introductory elements.

Introductory Element	Definition	Examples
Prepositional phrase	Preposition + optional description + noun	<i>at</i> midnight, <i>in</i> Count Dracula's castle, <i>under</i> Fred's nose, <i>on</i> the other hand, etc.
Participle phrase	Verb + <i>ing</i> Verb + <i>ed</i> Irregular form of irregular verb	<i>slurping</i> up the last few drops of the chocolate shake, <i>wheezing</i> like a cat with a hairball, <i>bumped</i> from the list, <i>broken</i> by the news, etc.
Infinitive phrase	<i>To</i> + verb	<i>to avoid</i> being eaten by a Great White shark, <i>to be</i> perfectly honest, <i>to conclude</i> , etc.
Appositive	Noun phrase renaming another noun	the best <i>student</i> in Dr. Wright's biology class, my <i>roommate</i> with the worst table manners, the shyest <i>boy</i> in class, etc.
Noun of direct address	Name of the person or being receiving the information	Ned, Mr. President, Mom, Jo-Jo, etc.
Adverb	Type of modifier, often ends in <i>ly</i>	meanwhile, unfortunately, however, etc.
Subordinate clause	Subordinate conjunction + subject + verb	when the computer began to beep wildly, unless you have heard otherwise, even though I warned him, etc.
Speaker tag	Subject + verb [identifies the speaker of a direct quotation]	Laverne shouted, Dr. Nordstrom stated, my mother asserted, etc.

Use a comma to connect the *introductory element* to the main clause that follows. Follow this pattern:

INTRODUCTORY ELEMENT + , + **MAIN CLAUSE** .

At midnight in Count Dracula's castle up on the hill, you can hear Diana Ross crooning from the stereo. [Introductory prepositional phrase]

¹ A main clause follows this pattern: **subject + verb = complete thought**. Every sentence must contain at least one main clause.

Slurping up the last few drops of the chocolate shake, Beverly was struck by lightning and toasted as crisp as a French fry. [Introductory participle phrase]

To avoid being eaten by a Great White shark, Roy rubs garlic on his body before entering the surf. [Introductory infinitive phrase]

The best student in Dr. Wright's biology class, Lakesha happily dissects every frog and pig fetus. [Introductory appositive]

Ned, were you the idiot who sprinkled sesame seeds on my strawberry cupcakes? [Introductory noun of direct address]

Meanwhile, the angry bees noticed Warren hiding in the bushes. [Introductory adverb acting as a transition]

When the computer began to beep wildly, Donald grabbed the monitor and threw it out the window. [Introductory subordinate clause]

Laverne shouted, "There's a giant spider tangled in your hair!" [Introductory speaker tag]

Quick Test

Directions: Add commas where they are necessary.

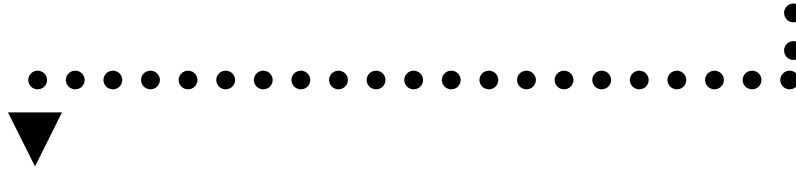
1. Because she is short Francine loves to go food shopping with Rachel, a tall friend. Strolling down the aisles Francine asks Rachel to grab packages of imported crackers and boxes of high-fiber cereal, items that are always too high to reach.
2. On top of the computer monitor in the bedroom a collection of stuffed unicorns supervises the work Lori completes at the keyboard below.
3. Akram has a problem hitting the snooze button on his alarm over and over. To get to his first class on time Akram frequently eats a donut in the car, getting crumbs all over the seat of his new vehicle.
4. Pablo walked all the way across campus before he noticed the lightness of his book bag. Suddenly he realized that his heavy chemistry text was on the backseat of his car.
5. In English class no one wants to sit next to Eli because he is always smacking his gum loudly. Moreover he nervously swings his leg, kicking people in the thighs, shins, and ankles.



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COMMA TIP 2



Use commas to set off an interrupter from the sentence that it divides.

Sentences will often have single words, phrases, or other clauses that interrupt them. Here are common interrupters:

Interrupter	Definition	Examples
Prepositional phrase	Preposition + optional description + noun	<i>at</i> midnight, <i>in</i> Count Dracula's castle, <i>under</i> Fred's nose, <i>on</i> the other hand, etc.
Participle phrase	Verb + <i>ing</i> Verb + <i>ed</i> Irregular form of irregular verb	<i>slurping</i> up the last few drops of the chocolate shake, <i>wheezing</i> like a cat with a hairball, <i>bumped</i> from the list, <i>broken</i> by the news, etc.
Infinitive phrase	<i>To</i> + verb	<i>to avoid</i> being eaten by a Great White shark, <i>to be</i> perfectly honest, <i>to conclude</i> , etc.
Appositive	Noun phrase renaming another noun	the best <i>student</i> in Dr. Wright's biology class, my <i>roommate</i> with the worst table manners, the shyest <i>boy</i> in class, etc.
Noun of direct address	Name of the person or being receiving the information	Ned, Mr. President, Mom, Jo-Jo, etc.
Adverb	Type of modifier, often ends in <i>ly</i>	meanwhile, unfortunately, however, etc.
Subordinate clause	Subordinate conjunction + subject + verb	when the computer began to beep wildly, unless you have heard otherwise, even though I warned him, etc.
Nonessential clause	Who, etc. + verb Who, etc. + subject + verb	<i>who</i> leaped across the counter at Bernie's Burger Emporium to get his own ketchup packets, <i>where</i> I saw my first elephant, <i>which</i> Timmy ate with gusto, etc.
Speaker tag	Subject + verb [identifies the speaker of a direct quotation]	Laverne shouted, Dr. Nordstrom stated, my mother asserted, etc.

These **interrupters**, grammatical units that disrupt the flow of the sentence, require commas both in front and behind. Prepositional phrases, participle phrases, infinitive phrases, appositives, nouns of direct address, some adverbs, subordinate clauses, nonessential clauses, and speaker tags can function as interrupters in a sentence. Follow this pattern:

FIRST PART OF THE SENTENCE + , + **INTERRUPTER** + , + **REST OF THE SENTENCE** .

My dog, ***on the other hand***, hides under the bed as soon as he hears company knocking at the door. [Interrupting prepositional phrase]

Sara's old car, **choking and wheezing like a cat with a hairball**, climbed the steep hill.
[Interrupting participle phrase]

Your girlfriend, **to be perfectly honest**, cares more for your wallet than she does for you.
[Interrupting infinitive phrase]

Lloyd Williams, **my roommate with the worst table manners**, was caught putting ketchup on his vanilla ice cream. [Interrupting appositive]

Can you tell us, **Mr. President**, if the allegations are true? [Interrupting noun of direct address]

The company has, **unfortunately**, recalled the ketchup ice cream that the marketing department hoped would be the next big food craze. [Interrupting adverb]

Those fifty algebra problems that Mrs. Tyson assigned, **unless you've heard otherwise**, are due at nine o'clock. [Interrupting subordinate clause]

My friend Neil, **who leaped across the counter at Bernie's Burger Emporium to get his own ketchup packets**, slipped in a puddle of vanilla ice cream and suffered a concussion when his head hit the fry station. [Interrupting nonessential clause]

"All of your ideas," **Dr. Nordstrom asserted**, "are hogwash." [Interrupting speaker tag]

Quick Test

Directions: Add commas where they are necessary.

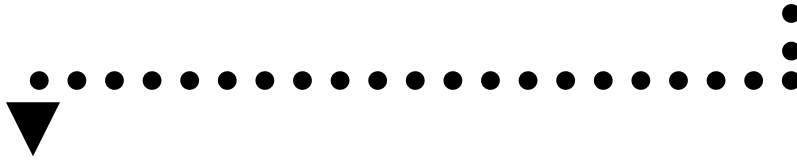
1. George used *War and Peace* a heavy, thick, intimidating book to smash the cockroaches he found crawling on the walls of his college dorm room.
2. Take this soup bone Joe and give it to the puppy before he starts chewing on our shoes.
3. "When you get hungry" my mother announced "I want you to try a bowl of this squid eyeball stew."
4. Mr. Finklestein who assigns more papers than he has time to grade keeps student essays half a semester before returning them.
5. January the month Julie usually dreads because of its cold, dark mornings was unusually warm this past year.



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COMMA TIP 4



Know when to use a comma with *and*.

Only three patterns in writing require *and*.

Pattern 1 – Joining two main clauses

First, you can use *and* to connect two main clauses¹. In this pattern, you should *always* use a comma.

MAIN CLAUSE + , + **and** + **MAIN CLAUSE** .

My dog Floyd sleeps on the bed, *and* my cat Buster naps in the bathtub.

A stack of dirty dishes fills the kitchen sink, *and* a pile of damp towels litters the bathroom floor.

Pattern 1 works with all of the coordinating conjunctions: *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*.

Pattern 2 – Joining any two units *except* main clauses

You can also use *and* to connect any *two* items. These items can be any grammatical unit *except* main clauses. When you have only two items, you do not need a comma with *and*.

ITEM + ∅ + **and** + **ITEM**

My dog Floyd has too many fleas *and* too much hair.

Buster, my cat, enjoys knocking glasses off of the kitchen counter *and* dragging toilet paper streamers through the house.

Pattern 2 also works with *but*, *nor*, *or*, and *yet*.

Pattern 3 – Joining three or more items in a series

When you have three or more items in a series, you should use a comma with the *and* that connects the last item.

ITEM + , + **ITEM** + , + **and** + **ITEM**

¹ A main clause follows this pattern: **subject + verb = complete thought**. Every sentence must contain at least one main clause.

My computer needs more RAM, a faster Pentium processor, **and** a color printer.

George has bad breath, no money, **and** an annoying mother, but Sherry Lynn still wants to date him.

Pattern 3 also works with **but**, **nor**, **or**, and **yet**.

Quick Test

Directions: Add commas where they are necessary.

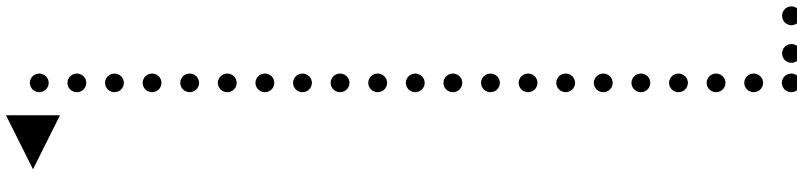
1. Tony wanted to order a pizza from Papa John's and some Peking duck from Lam's Garden.
2. Debbie rushed to get the report typed and Martha frantically answered the phones.
3. I don't know when to leave my credit card at home and when to say no to a Big Mac with fries.
4. When Mike took his Toyota to the dealership, the mechanics wanted to put in a new starter, replace his shocks and overhaul the transmission.
5. Because George snores to wake the dead and because Fuzzball, the dog, barks at the slightest sound, Alice never gets a good night's sleep.



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COMMA TIP 5



When *necessary*, use commas for clauses that begin with *where*, *wherever*, *which*, *whichever*, *who*, *whoever*, *whom*, *whomever*, *whose*, and *whosever*.

Clauses that begin with the relative pronouns and relative adverbs above have two classifications.

The first classification is **essential**. An essential clause gives information that defines or clarifies the very general word coming before it. Essential clauses require no punctuation.

The student + Ø + **ESSENTIAL CLAUSE** + Ø + ran to his class.

The student *who saw a space ship land in the parking lot* ran to his class.

The student *whom Dr. Skinner counsels* ran to his class.

Mrs. Mauzy returned the quiz to the student + Ø + **ESSENTIAL CLAUSE**.

Mrs. Mauzy returned the quiz to the student *who slept in class every day*.

Mrs. Mauzy returned the quiz to the student *whom everyone admires*.

The second classification of these clauses is **nonessential**. A nonessential clause gives information or clarifies an already specific word. Nonessential clauses, because they interrupt the flow of the sentence or cause a strong break at the end, require separation with commas.

Robert + , + **NONESSENTIAL CLAUSE** + , + ran to his class.

Robert, *who saw a space ship land in the parking lot*, ran to his class.

Robert, *whom Dr. Skinner counsels*, ran to his class.

Mrs. Mauzy returned the quiz to Kristy + , + **NONESSENTIAL CLAUSE**.

Mrs. Mauzy returned the quiz to Kristy, *who slept in class every day*.

Mrs. Mauzy returned the quiz to Kristy, *whom everyone admires*.

Quick Test

Directions: Add commas where they are necessary.

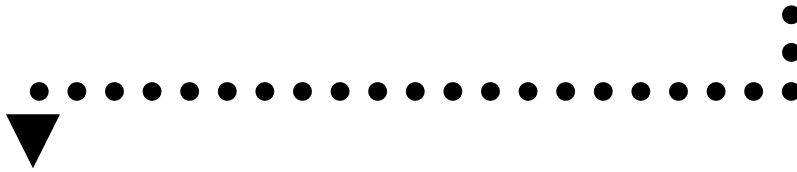
1. People who know their grammar rules shouldn't always correct those of us who don't.
2. My brother James who cannot please Dad has decided to move to Michigan.
3. The basketball players whom I admire the most play for teams other than the Orlando Magic.
4. The movie *Aliens* which I have seen twenty-seven times contains too much violence for my nephews to watch.
5. We watched a crazy kid on a skateboard weave through the heavy traffic on Orange Avenue. The kid who had no fear of death or litigation leaped a curb and crashed into a lawyer walking along the sidewalk.



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COMMA TIP 6



Use commas correctly with a series of adjectives.

Whenever you use more than one adjective to describe something, you must decide whether or not you need commas to separate the adjectives. **Coordinate** adjectives require commas.

Noncoordinate adjectives, however, need no punctuation. How do you tell the difference? **Coordinate** adjectives can pass two tests:

Test 1 – When you reverse the order of the adjectives, the sentence makes sense.

Read this example:

The ***hungry, slimy, green*** Martian opened the classroom door, grabbed Claudette, and took her to lunch at Bernie’s Burger Emporium.

The three adjectives—***hungry, slimy,*** and ***green***—can alternate their positions without hurting the meaning of the sentence:

The ***slimy, hungry, green*** Martian opened the classroom door ...

The ***hungry, green, slimy*** Martian opened the classroom door ...

The ***green, slimy, hungry*** Martian opened the classroom door ...

Because these adjectives can be interchanged, they are coordinate and must have commas between them.

Test 2 – When you insert *and* between the adjectives, the sentence makes sense.

Read this example:

While writing his final exam, a ***pale, sweating, panicky*** student stared at his sentence, trying to decide if a comma was necessary between two adjectives.

Notice that you can insert ***and*** between the three adjectives and the sentence still makes sense [although there is some unnecessary repetition].

While writing his final exam, a ***pale and sweating and panicky*** student stared at his sentence ...

Noncoordinate adjectives can pass neither of the tests above. Whenever you discover that you have noncoordinate adjectives in a sentence, use no punctuation between them.

Read this sentence:

Five flashy sports cars passed poor Jared, who rattled down the interstate in his '78 Chevette.

Notice that if you move the location of the adjectives, you create illogic:

Sports flashy five cars passed poor Jared ... Huh?
Flashy sports five cars passed poor Jared ... What?
Five sports flashy cars passed poor Jared ... Makes no sense!

In addition, if you insert **and** between the adjectives, the sentence loses its meaning:

Five and flashy and sports cars passed poor Jared ... Excuse me?

When you encounter noncoordinate adjectives, those that fail the two tests detailed above, do not use commas between them.

Quick Test

Directions: Add commas where they are necessary.

1. Two cluttered computer tables and an unmade sagging bed fill Antonio's small bedroom.
2. The cute soft frisky ferret will bite your fingers if you try to pick him up.
3. Michael's faded ragged New York Jets jacket was an inappropriate choice of clothing for his second interview at Sun Trust Bank.
4. The hot spicy appetizing squid eyeball stew steamed in a bowl on the clean shiny kitchen counter.
5. A strange smell emanated from Barbara's blue disorganized book bag, which lay on the floor beside her desk.



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