

The Comma

The following rules indicate how to use commas properly and also how to eliminate commas when you feel you're over-using them.

1. To Join Two Short Complete Sentences into One Sentence by Using a Coordinating Conjunction (and, but, or, for, nor, so, yet):

I left the restaurant with my takeout, yet I still felt my order was wrong.

Note: You need both the conjunction and the comma. Using just the comma—"I left the restaurant, I still felt my order was wrong"—is called a comma splice.

2. To Separate Items in a Series of Three or More Items:

Nouns: They praised her for her kindness, generosity, and organization.

Verbs: He writes essays, adds numbers, and throws touchdowns.

Note: MLA and APA require a comma before the "and." AP doesn't.

3. After an Introductory Clause or Phrase:

As she read from her notes, her presentation became harder to follow.

After he searched for the required library book, Evans found what he considered to be a suitable replacement.

Note: (1) Starting a sentence with a prepositional phrase (often indicating where and when an action takes place) usually requires a comma. (2) To eliminate a comma, move the introductory phrase to the end of the sentence and omit the comma: "The judges will announce the winner after Sunday brunch."

4. When Providing Extra Information about a Person You are Describing:

Katie, Sara's little sister, works on campus.

Note: If the descriptive information precedes the person, omit the comma: "Sara's little sister Katie works on campus."

5. In Dates and Geographical Locations:

My dad was born on February 4, 1967.

I want to move to Bernie, Texas.

6. To Separate Direct Quotes from the Rest of the Sentence:

"I don't want to go," Joe said with a sigh.

According to VanHekken (2008), "Piloting zeppelins is not difficult; landing them—now that's tough!"