

HOW TO:

Use Commas

BEFORE A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION

Conjunctions: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So (memory tip: FANBOYS).
Add a comma **before** one of these conjunctions to join independent clauses.

Example: Nearly everyone has heard of love at first sight, but I fell in love at first dance.



BEFORE NON-RESTRICTIVE ELEMENTS

Non-restrictive elements are phrases that provide extra, non-essential information and must be separated from the main independent clause.

Example: Norman Mailer's first novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, was a best-seller.

TO SET OFF TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS

Separating parenthetical expressions, absolute phrases, and contrasted elements.

Examples:

Evolution, so far as we know, does not work this way. (Parenthetical)

His tennis game at last perfected, Chris won the cup. (Absolute)

Now that I am married, Jane talks to me as an adult, not as her little sister.

(Contrasted)

AFTER AN INTRODUCTORY WORD GROUP

Examples: When Irwin was ready to eat, he turned off his phone to enjoy his meal uninterrupted.

Although Blake likes pineapple, he does not like pineapple on pizza.

Sentences starting with words like **although** **when** **unless** **while** & **because** signal a **word group** that requires **a comma at the end of the word group**.

BETWEEN ALL ITEMS IN A SERIES

Example: For breakfast the children ordered cornflakes, English muffins with peanut butter, and cherry Cokes.

Academic writing uses the "Oxford comma," which is the comma placed before the word *and* in a list or series.

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BETWEEN COORDINATING ADJECTIVES

When adjectives are not joined by *and* or other coordinate adjectives.

Example: Rosa has become a strong, confident, independent woman.

TO SET OFF NOUNS OF DIRECT ADDRESS

The words *yes* and *no*, interrogative tags, and mild interjections.

Example: Yes, the loan was approved.

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TO SET OFF DIRECT QUOTATIONS

After expressions like "he said."

Example: Naturalist Arthur Cleveland Bent remarked, "In part the prairie falcon declined unnoticed because it is not adorable."

WITH DATES, ADDRESSES, TITLES, OR NUMBERS

Example: John Lennon was born in Liverpool, England, in 1940.

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HOW TO:

Avoid Mistakes When Using Commas

Never...

After a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, not, yet, for, so)

EX: Soap operas are performed live, but, more often they are taped.

Never...

After such as or like.

EX: Many shade-loving plants, such as, begonias, impatiens, and coleus, can add colour to a shady garden.

Never...

Before than

EX: Touring Crete was more thrilling for us, than visiting the Greek Islands frequented by the jet set.

Never...

With parenthesis

EX: Sylvia went from an entry-level position, (a clerk), to regional manager within five years.

Never...

After although

EX: Although, the air was balmy, the water was too cold for swimming.

Never...

To set off an indirect (reported) quotation

EX: Samuel Goldwyn once said, that a verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's written on.

Never...

With a question mark or exclamation point

EX: "Why don't you try it?" she coaxed.

When used incorrectly, commas disrupt the reader's processing of the sentence, resulting in confused or unclear meaning.

Confused or unclear meaning is a quality of C, D, and F grades in writing.