

# COMMAS

Use commas:

1. To mark the breaks between items in a series.

EXAMPLES: The alumni's spirit was evident in the loud cheers, the spirited songs, and the rousing music.

For the best results, be sure to include flour, eggs, and butter.

NOTE: If items in a series already contain commas, then use semicolons to separate the main elements.

EXAMPLE: The winter weather in Seattle was rainy, windy, and cold; the driving was fast, furious, and courteous, yet all was forgiven with a glimpse of the mountains.

NOTE: There is no hard and fast rule regarding the comma before the "and" in a series. Some prefer to omit the comma. Others feel that using the comma makes the reading clearer. In any case, be aware of your professor's preference and, above all, be consistent in your use.

2. Before the coordinating conjunctions *and*, *but*, *so*, *for*, *yet*, *or*, *nor* to join independent clauses.

EXAMPLES: None of the partners wants to dissolve their assets, nor do any agree to the bankruptcy proceedings arranged by the attorney.

The telephone rang many, many times, so John answered it even though he was at Tiffany's house.

3. To mark the end of a long (four or more words) introductory element.

- a. Use commas after long introductory prepositional phrases, but usually not after short phrases.

EXAMPLES: **In a little cabin at the edge of the woods across the river**, lives an old man with his twenty-seven cats. (After the succession of four introductory prepositional phrases, a comma is needed to separate them from the rest of the sentence.)

**In the morning** I will call my boss. (A short prepositional phrase needs no comma after it.)

- b. Use commas after introductory clauses unless they are quite short or have no special emphasis.

EXAMPLES: **After Sue had finished playing**, the piano was rolled offstage. (Note that without the comma, you might tend to read this sentence, "After Sue had finished playing the piano..," which would be very confusing.)

**Whenever I see her**, I admire her courage in the face of adversity.

**Considering how much she has already learned**, Marcie was surprised at how poorly prepared she was for her new position.

4. To separate an interruption from the rest of a sentence.

EXAMPLES: The crowd, however, was cheering after the scoring drive despite the flag on the field.

The winter's chill, despite the shining sun, was enough to bring the children home early.

5. To separate quoted words from the rest of a sentence.

EXAMPLE: "The whole idea is ludicrous," Jonathan thought after hearing the proposal.

6. To separate items in an address or date.

EXAMPLES: Her address is 1916 First Avenue North, Apt. 604, Austin, Texas, for the rest of the semester.

He was born on June 26, 2004, in the middle of a heat wave.

7. To set off non-restrictive clauses (a group of words that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence).

EXAMPLES: Mr. Hoffer, whose family lives in Germany, will be our guest this weekend.

Mr. Johnson, whose son attends the University, is our friend.

8. To set off an appositive (a group of words renaming the subject).

EXAMPLE: Jen, a computer security specialist, completed her third 100-mile cycling event in a month.

## COMMA EXERCISES

**A. Directions: Insert periods where they belong. If the sentence is correct, write a "C" beside the number.**

1. The baker always preferred a light moist loaf of bread.
2. This shoe will appeal to more runners since it has an improved heel construction tougher sole and better arch support.
3. Oh I remember very clearly now.
4. July 4 1776 is a significant date to students of American history.
5. The little Chinese girl received a pretty red gown to wear at the celebration.
6. Miss Templeton my old high school English teacher is now the mayor of our suburban enclave.
7. She had been searching for a hand-carved antique rocking chair.
8. Hot murky stagnant pools surrounded the estate.
9. The vessel is sleekly constructed extremely seaworthy and easy to sail.
10. After the rainstorm passed the new worker repaired the roof on the fragile tin shack.
11. The poor old man bet and lost his last dollar.
12. Learning how to breathe properly can be the most important technique of jogging.
13. Students wishing to live near campus will have to pay higher rent for unsatisfactory rundown housing.
14. My oldest and dearest friend is moving to Florida so that she can swim jog travel and retire more easily.
15. To end up in prison is a notable failure in this country and most people consider that failure to be enduring.
16. Allen is against all kinds of physical emotional and mental confinement.
17. A course which would teach grammar to freshman students would be valuable and worthwhile.
18. Many tourists who crowd the Hawaiian islands are disappointed at the expense of their trip the short time they are there and the commercialism of the islands.
19. First of all you're going to have to show more respect to ladies.
20. No I did not vote last time for the President and I won't vote for him in this election.
21. Leaving the campsite at night he forgot his ice chest and flashlight.
22. Her old address was 952 Colonial Circle Tempe Arizona a far cry from her new address in Akron Ohio.
23. With a black hood pulled around her head and shoulders she edged into the dark gray pond.
24. For example no Latin is taught at this university.
25. Because they were great sailors the Vikings were formidable warriors at sea.

**B. DIRECTIONS: Add commas where they are needed in the following paragraph.**

Aaron Copland one of the grand old men of American music came in with the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was born in Brooklyn New York on November 14 1900 and he began to study piano at the relatively late age of thirteen. He started composing soon after. Unlike many struggling artists he met success early which is a little unusual since he was only nineteen when he published his first piece. Although his earliest works show the influence of his studies in Europe his later compositions are filled with American sounds. For example he built symphonies around folk tunes jazz rhythms and hymns. Perhaps the familiarity of these sounds has helped to make his music popular with people who don't usually listen to orchestral music. At the same time the clean and disciplined harmonies that link the horns and strings in his pieces have won Copland the reverence of music lovers. One critic said of him "Copland our own boy from Brooklyn is able to please the person in the back seat of the taxi and the driver too."

**ANSWERS: A**

1. light,
2. construction, tougher sole,\*
3. Oh,
4. 4, 1776,
5. C
6. Templeton, ...teacher,
7. C
8. Hot,
9. constructed, ...seaworthy,\*

10. passed,
11. C
12. C
13. unsatisfactory,
14. swim, jog, travel,\*
15. country, and
16. physical, emotional,\*
17. C
18. trip, ...there,\*

19. all,
20. no, ...President,
21. night,
22. Circle, Tempe, Arizona, ...Akron,
23. shoulders,
24. example,
25. sailors,

**ANSWERS: B**

Aaron Copland, one of the grand old men of American music, came in with the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was born in Brooklyn, New York, on November 14, 1900, and he began to study piano at the relatively late age of thirteen. He started composing soon after. Unlike many struggling artists, he met success early, which is a little unusual since he was only nineteen when he published his first piece. Although his earliest works show the influence of his studies in Europe, his later compositions are filled with American sounds. For example, he built symphonies around folk tunes, jazz rhythms,\* and hymns. Perhaps the familiarity of these sounds has helped to make his music popular with people who don't usually listen to orchestral music. At the same time, the clean and disciplined harmonies that link the horns and strings in his pieces have won Copland the reverence of music lovers. One critic said of him, "Copland, our own boy from Brooklyn, is able to please the person in the back seat of the taxi and the driver, too."

**\*NOTE:** The comma before the conjunction in a series can be omitted; however, it is never wrong and can help the reader. Be consistent with whatever you choose.

Sources: Butler, Eugenia, Mary Ann Hickman, and Lalla Overby. *Correct Writing*. D.C. Health & Co., 1978. Farbman, Evelyn. *Sentence Sense: A Writer's Guide*, 1989.

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