



Success Center Overview of Comma Usage

SERIES: Use a comma after each word (except the last) in a series of three or more words or phrases.

- 1 2 3
- Reading, writing, and literature classes at SWIC are great fun.
- 1 2 3
- We studied hard, aced the test, and celebrated until dawn.
- 1 2 3
- I went to Florida, Cancun, and Hawaii for some R & R after taking ENG 101.

COMPOUND SENTENCE: Use a comma before coordinating conjunctions (REMEMBER FANBOYS: **f**or, **a**nd, **n**or, **b**ut, **o**r, **y**et, **s**o) when they connect two complete sentences.

- The weather outside is frightful. The fire is so delightful.
- The weather outside is frightful, **but** the fire is so delightful.
- My kids went sledding in their bikinis. They froze.
- My kids went sledding in their bikinis, **so** they froze.
- I put more wood on the fire. They thawed out nicely.
- I put more wood on the fire, **and** they thawed out nicely.

INTRODUCTORY ELEMENT: Use a comma to separate an introductory word, phrase, or clause from the main sentence.

- (dependent clause) (main sentence)
- If you are what you eat, then I must be a gallon of ice cream.
- (prepositional phrase) (main sentence)
- In a state of emergency, I will eat frozen yogurt or sorbet.
- (word) (main sentence)
- Unfortunately, *die* is part of the word diet.
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DATES AND PLACES: Use commas to set off years when part of a date and states when used with a city.

- We moved to Belleville, Illinois, on July 4, 2004, after we entered the witness protection program.

But, there is no comma needed if the city, state, month, or year stand alone.

- We moved to Illinois in 2004 after we entered the witness protection program.

APPOSITIVES:

Use commas to set off a noun when it is identifying or explaining a previous noun, when the **second noun** is not necessary to the meaning of the sentence.

- Mr. Rogers, **my math teacher**, offers extra credit throughout the semester.
- Oprah Winfrey, **a talk show host**, does a lot of giveaways.

If a second noun is needed to make the first noun clearer, then a comma is not needed.

- The math teacher Mr. Rogers offers extra credit throughout the semester.
- The talk show host Oprah Winfrey does a lot of giveaways.

CONJUNCTIVE ADVERBS (CA)

a conjunction that signals relationships between parts of a sentence

also	furthermore	likewise	next	then
anyway	however	meanwhile	now	therefore
besides	incidentally	moreover	otherwise	thus
certainly	indeed	namely	similarly	undoubtedly
finally	instead	nevertheless	still	

Semicolon: Use a semicolon before a conjunctive adverb (CA) when a CA connects two sentences.

Sentence; CA sentence.

- Fred promised to make up the work; **however** we doubted his sincerity.

or

Sentence; CA, sentence.

- Fred promised to make up the work; **however,** we doubted his sincerity.

Comma: A comma is *sometimes* used before and/or after a conjunctive adverb (CA) when there is only one complete sentence.

However, we doubted his sincerity.

We, **however**, doubted his sincerity.

We doubted his sincerity, **however**.

Thus we are **still** mad at him.

SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS (SC)

a conjunction that introduces a subordinate clause

as	though	than	when	because
if	although	that	where	once
as if	even though	so that	whether	since
before	unless	in order that	while	
after	until			

Comma: Use a comma *after* a subordinating conjunction (SC) which starts a sentence.

SC clause, **sentence.**

- **Because** Fred didn't do his paper, our group got a bad grade.

SC clause, **sentence.**

- **Even though** we are friends, I am mad at Fred.

No Comma: A comma is unnecessary when a SC connects two sentences (or actually connects a dependent clause to an independent clause).

Sentence **SC** **sentence.**

- The instructor told us to do extra work **if** he wanted to pass.

Sentence **SC** **sentence.**

- We went to Six Flags **while** Fred stayed home to study.

HINT: SC dependent, independent.

Independent **SC** dependent.

PREPOSITIONS (prep)

show relationships, often with respect to time or location

HINT: Remember *time*, **location**, and opposites.

about	among	beneath	<i>during</i>	into	onto	toward
above	around	beside	except	like	out	under
across	as	between	far from	near	over	<i>until</i>
according to	at	beyond	for	next to	past	up
<i>after</i>	<i>before</i>	by	from	of	regarding	upon
against	behind	down	in/inside	off	since	with
along	below	due to	in front of	on	through	without

COMMA: Use a comma *after* a prepositional phrase which starts a sentence.

Prep phrase, **sentence.**

- **During** the day, we felt guilty about going to Six Flags without Fred.

Prep phrase, **sentence.**

- **Far from** the excitement of the park, Fred was confined to his room.

NO COMMA: A comma is unnecessary when a prepositional phrase is in the middle or end of a sentence.

- We figured it would take Fred **about** three weeks to finish his work.
- We were having fun **without** him.

HINT: Comma use is the same as with SC.