

RULES FOR COMMAS

When to use commas:

1. **BETWEEN TWO INDEPENDENT CLAUSES** joined by a coordinating conjunction [*and, but, or, for, nor, so, yet*]
*I went to the store, **but** I did not buy anything.*
[do NOT use a comma between two verbs: *I went to the store but did not buy anything.*]
2. To separate **TWO OR MORE ITEMS IN A SERIES** [note the comma in front of the *and* of the last item]
Mary woke up, made breakfast, got dressed, and went to work.
[do NOT use a comma between only two items: *Mary woke up and went to work.*]
3. After sentence elements **THAT ARE IN FRONT OF AN INDEPENDENT CLAUSE**
WORDS: *Unfortunately, the concert will have to be rescheduled at a later date.*
PHRASES: *Without money to buy a saddle, the stranger had to ride bareback.*
DEPENDENT CLAUSES: *Because it was raining, Mike could not go out.*
[do NOT use a comma when the dependent clause is at the end: *Mike could not go out **because it was raining.***]
4. Around elements that **INTERRUPT a sentence** [these are often movable]
WORDS and PHRASES: *My dog, **I feel**, is the best in the show. The judges, **however**, didn't think so.*
APPOSITIVE PHRASES: *Isaac Asimov, **author or annotator of 477 books**, was born in Russia.* [in middle]
*She volunteered at Camillus House, **a shelter for the homeless**.* [at end]
***Skilled in the art of deception**, Boris managed to escape Olga's wrath.* [at beginning]
5. **To set off the NAME OF THE PERSON TO WHOM YOU ARE SPEAKING**, whether at the beginning, middle, or end: ***Ben**, where are you? Where are you, **Ben**? Please, **Ben**, speak up.*
6. Around **NONESSENTIAL CLAUSES** [*who* clauses after a specific person and *which* clauses]
*My math book, **which is on my desk**, contains useful information.*
*Sam, **who knew the stranger from high school**, introduced him to us.*
[The clause *who knew the stranger from high school* is not necessary to identify Sam.]
Do NOT use commas around ESSENTIAL clauses [*that* clauses and necessary *who* clauses]
*Only the books **that are in the box** need to be returned to the library.*
*The man **who knew the stranger from high school** introduced him to us.*
[the clause *who knew the stranger from high school* is necessary to identify which man]
7. In **TITLES** (before and after)
*Mark Welby, **M.D.**, is my doctor. John R. Smith, **Ph.D.**, has a degree from Harvard.*
8. In **DIRECT QUOTATIONS** [the comma is always to the left of the quotation mark]
He asked, "May I see the doctor?" "No," she replied.
"Then I'm not," he declared indignantly, "going to swallow the pill!"

In a divided quote, a period rather than comma goes before the second half **ONLY** if it is a new sentence:
"I studied all night," complained Martha. "I'd better pass this test!"
9. In **DATES and ADDRESSES**
*Jane lived at **41 Marigold Lane, Toledo, Ohio**, for twenty years.* [notice the comma after the address]
*I was born on **November 21, 1970**, in Tampa.* [notice the comma after the date]
[do NOT use a comma between a month and year without a date: *I was born in November 1970.*]
10. Between **TWO or MORE ADJECTIVES before a noun** [if they could be reversed]
*A **young, friendly** [or *friendly, young*] raccoon raided the trash bin.*
Do NOT use a comma if they could not be reversed: *She has **light brown** hair.* [you could not say *brown light hair*]
11. To set off **contrasted elements**:
*Walter dreamed of **achievements, not riches**. It was **you, not I**, who made that statement.*

COMMA PRACTICE

Place commas where they are needed; in the space provided, write the number of the rule it follows.

- ___ 1. Since the cake had cooled I started to frost it.
- ___ 2. It was Jonathan not his brother who won the title two years in a row.
- ___ 3. My friend goes to Jack Warren D.D.S. to get his teeth checked.
- ___ 4. I would like to go to Vermont but I cannot afford it.
- ___ 5. Judy Johnson who works in the accounting department got married and moved to Texas.
- ___ 6. In high school he played baseball football basketball and soccer.
- ___ 7. My brother received an honorable discharge from the Army on May 14 1982.
- ___ 8. The girl who was Ken's girlfriend won the newspaper's essay contest.
- ___ 9. The llama a dignified looking animal has been known to spit at people.
- ___ 10. I moved to 1700 S.W. 19 Street Miami Florida.
- ___ 11. Whenever I eat my dog begs for food.
- ___ 12. My dog begs for food whenever I eat.
- ___ 13. The Senate hearings in my opinion are going nowhere.
- ___ 14. The tired grumpy instructor marched into the classroom.
- ___ 15. Ronel's book which is full of anecdotes about his travels in Mexico should be required reading for travelers going south of the border.
- ___ 16. Debbie come pick up this clothing of yours that is lying on the floor.
- ___ 17. Wearing the oldest suit in her closet Jan went in to ask her boss for a raise.
- ___ 18. His '69 Corvette which is a source of pride for him is in mint condition.
- ___ 19. "Be there at noon" he ordered.
- ___ 20. Micro-Electronic Computer Company winner of the Leadership in Business award was founded by my uncle.
- ___ 21. The pitcher finished his warm-up and then went to sit on the bench.