



Illinois Valley Community College
Writing Center

COMMAS

1. Use commas to separate items in a series.

The woman bought a pink dress, purple scarf, and crystal necklace.

2. Use a comma to combine two independent clauses (complete sentences) with a coordinating conjunction. Coordinating conjunctions= FANBOYS (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So).

I raced to school, but I was still late to class.

Independent

Independent

The weather was warm, so we swam all day.

Independent

Independent

3. Use a comma to follow introductory words, phrases, or clauses.

a) Introductory words

Yes, I would be glad to bring a dessert.

Ultimately, I decided to drop the course.

b) Introductory phrases

Seeing the tears on his face, I realized he was hurt.

c) Introductory dependent clauses

When the bell rang, the students filed into school. Because the man sang well, he joined a band.

While I wrote my paper, I listened to Mozart. Since school began, I have been busy.

4. Use a comma after conjunctive adverbs. (however, therefore, moreover, consequently, nonetheless)

Susan did not read the chapter; therefore, she failed the exam.

The student was tired; however, she continued studying for her calculus exam.

5. Use a comma around nouns in direct address. *When you mention the name of the person you are talking to, that is direct address.*

Feed the children, John, before you leave for work.

6. Place commas around an appositive. An appositive is a noun or phrase that renames a nearby noun.

My favorite book, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, makes me laugh every time I open it.

Here, the speaker's favorite book is the same thing as *Where the Sidewalk Ends*.

7. Use commas around a word, phrase, or clause that interrupts the main idea unless the phrase includes information that is essential to the meaning of the sentence.

a. Interrupting word or phrase

The water, however, tasted like eggs.

The author, of course, wrote novels and poetry.

c) Interrupting phrase

The janitor, who was wearing a bright blue shirt today, erased the board.

The last test, which is tomorrow, will cover three chapters from the textbook.

Note: If the interrupting phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence, do not put commas around it.

Example: Women who are pregnant should not smoke or drink alcohol, especially during the first trimester.

No commas should be placed around “who are pregnant” because the phrase includes information that is essential to the meaning of the sentence. The rest of the sentence does not apply to all women.

8. Use commas between coordinate adjectives. *Coordinate adjectives are two or more adjectives together which modify a noun separately.*

Coordinate Adjectives: Stephanie is a responsible, bright student.

Note: If you can insert the word “and” between the adjectives, use a comma in the original sentence.

Stephanie is a responsible *and* bright student.

Do not place commas between cumulative adjectives.

Three dirty red cars line up at the car wash. (You cannot put “and” between three, dirty, red; therefore, do not put commas between the adjectives.)

9. Use a comma to set off exact words spoken in dialogue. *Place the comma and period inside the quotation marks.*

“Please leave,” she cried, “and don’t come back.”

10. Use a comma where it is necessary to prevent a misunderstanding.

Kicking, the child was carried out of the room.

11. Use a comma in numbers of one thousand or larger.

2,934 100,000 5,000,000

12. Use commas with dates and addresses.

The convention will be held on July 9, 2006 at Illinois Valley Community College, which is located at 815 North Orlando Smith Avenue, Oglesby, IL 61348.