

When to Use **COMMAS!**

SIX Main Reasons to Use a Comma:

1. To set off **items in a series**

For descriptive words, use the “and” test:

“two tiny puncture marks” vs. “a ripe, juicy apple”

2. A. After **introductory material**

This includes adverbs, all types of phrases, dependent clauses, etc.

Ex. Fearlessly, Amar picked up the hissing cat.

In the blink of an eye, the mouse was gone.

Though the computer has been fixed, the monitor is still acting up.

B. Before extra **material at the end of the sentence**

Ex. He waited at the employment office all day, trying to find a suitable job.

Shera has trouble accepting criticism, except from Frieda.

3. Around **interrupters** (unnecessary or additional information)

If the info is necessary to identify the subject, do not use commas:

Ex. The woman who is my best friend won the lottery.

Otherwise place commas around this interrupting material:

Ex. Candace Raymond, who is my best friend, just won the lottery.

The car, cleaned and repaired, is ready to be sold.

Taking long walks, especially after dark, helps him sort out his thoughts.

4. Between two **independent clauses** with a coordinating conjunction

Ex. My parents threatened to throw me out of the house, so I had to stop playing the drums.

DO NOT use a comma in sentences with *one* subject and two verbs:

Ex. Jay lay awake that stormy night and listened to the thunder crashing.

5. To set off **direct quotations** from the rest of the sentence

Ex. “Those who sling mud,” a famous politician once said, “usually lose ground.”

6. **Miscellaneous** uses: direct address, dates and addresses

Ex. of direct address: Please, Janie, will you stop chewing on my book?
(a few examples of) When NOT to Use Commas

1. Between subject and verb
The gorilla sitting in the corner of the cage thumped his chest.
2. Before part of a compound structure that is not an independent clause
Mark Twain trained as a printer and worked as a steamboat pilot.
3. Between a verb and its complement or object
The best gifts are food and clothes.
4. After “such as”
Popular fast-food items, such as hamburgers and hot dogs, tend to be high in cholesterol.
5. Before a clause beginning with “that”
They warned us that the meeting would be difficult.

When to Use a SEMICOLON (;)

TWO (and ONLY two!) reasons:

1. to link **closely related independent clauses**
Biography tells us about the subject; biographers also tell us about themselves.

The results of the study support the hypothesis; *however*, further research with a variety of tasks is necessary.

Remember that *however* and other **transitional words** are NOT coordinating conjunctions and need a semicolon to properly join clauses.

Other such words/phrases: therefore, similarly, in fact, certainly, next, etc.

2. to separate **items in a series containing other punctuation**
When I cleaned out the refrigerator, I found a chocolate cake, half-eaten; a can of tomato paste, which had a blue fungus growing on the top; and some possibly edible meat loaf.