

The Uses of the Comma

There are seven most important uses of the comma (,).

1. Use a comma after every item in a series except the last item.

Example: The three wrecked cars are maroon, purple, and orange.

2. Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction that joins two independent clauses.
(IC, CC IC)

IC CC IC

Example: The roof always leaked, but he never bothered to fix it.

3. Use a comma after a subordinate clause that begins a sentence. (SC, IC).

SC IC

Example: Because the coffee table was scratched, I refused to buy it.

4. Use a comma after a phrase of three or more words that begins a sentence.
Long phrase

Example: Walking along the beach, Mary found a dollar.

5. Use commas to set off any word, phrase, or clause that interrupts the flow of the sentence. In other words, if you could set off a word or a group of words with parentheses but do not wish to do so, then set off that word or group of words with commas.

Examples: Judy, together with Carrie, looked eagerly at the envelopes.

Mary, who was strolling along the beach, found a dollar.

Notice that interrupters in the middle of a sentence have commas on both sides.

6. Use commas to set off non-defining clauses. This rule is actually an expansion of rule 5, because all non-defining clauses are interrupters. A defining clause is essential to defining whatever it modifies. In the following example, let's assume that you have several brothers:

My brother who is wearing a red motorcycle helmet is older than I am.

A non-defining clause is not essential in defining whatever it modifies. Since it is not essential, you can omit it and everybody would still know who or what you are talking about. Now let's assume that you have only one brother:

My brother, who is wearing a red motorcycle helmet, is older than I am.

7. Use a comma after a conjunctive adverb unless it is the last word in the sentence. (CA, IC,) or (IC; CA, IC.) This rule applies no matter where the conjunctive adverb appears in the sentence.

Examples:

IC CA IC
I rescued the fair damsel. However, the dragon burnt my sword.

IC CA IC
I rescued the fair damsel; however, the dragon burnt my sword.

IC IC
I rescued the fair damsel; the dragon, however, burnt my sword.
CA

Exercise 1: Write a sentence illustrating each of the above rules.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

Exercise 2: In the following sentences, add commas where necessary:

1. Tennis, an active sport requires a lot of running.
2. When you finish the piano lesson you will have time to feed the pets.
3. The show was not very crowded because it was very expensive.
4. The firemen raced to the house; however they were too late.
5. For breakfast he ate cereal ham and eggs and toast.
6. The river flooded by the heavy rain raged violently through the canyon.
7. The cashier who has black hair smiled enticingly. (note: there is only one cashier).
8. Sliding through the mud the children were having a wonderful time.
9. The gallery's new artist who uses vivid pastel colours painted the picture of my room.(note: the gallery has several new artists.)
10. Whenever the reporter was at the office he was sitting at his desk; he was usually dosing however.
11. Although he shouted the name the traffic noise kept us from hearing it.
12. Yes the company has complete faith ladies and gentlemen in our incoming chairman.

CONJUNCTIONS

KIND	HOW USED	PUNCTUATION
1. Coordinating (CO) Fanboys - for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so	Must join equal units such as nouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, predicates, clauses, or main clauses	In a series of three or more items joined in parallel form by commas, a comma goes between each of the items and before the conjunction. Ex. Dogs, children, and clowns were in the parade. When joining two main clauses, always use a comma before the coordinating conjunction. Ex. We went on home, for it was clear that Jerry was not going to appear. Do not use a comma before the conjunction if you are only joining two predicates. Ex. He went into the water and sank to the bottom.
2. Correlative (COR) either...or neither...nor both...and not only... but (also) whether...or	Used in pairs to join equal units (noun to noun, adjective to adjective, etc.)	No punctuation unless joining two independent clauses Ex. Either your mother or I will pick you up from school. Ex. Either your mother will pick you up from school, or I will pick you up.
3. Subordinating (S) after provided although since as so that as if than as much as till as long as unless as soon as until as though whatever because when before whenever if where in order that wherever	Used to join clauses of unequal rank (a dependent or subordinate clause to an independent clause)	When the dependent clause introduces the sentence, put a comma at the end of the dependent clause. Ex. After we went to the show, we went out to eat. No comma is needed if the dependent clause comes after the independent clause. Ex. We went out to eat after we went to the show.

lest	whether while		
4. Conjunctive Adverb (CA)		Used to join independent clauses	The conjunctive adverb should be preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma. Ex. My test scores are high; consequently, I should go to college.
accordingly	moreover		
also	nevertheless		
consequently	nonetheless		
furthermore	otherwise		
hence	then		
however	therefore		
instead	thus		

CONJUNCTION WORKSHEET

Directions: Underline the conjunction. On the line to the left, indicate the kind. Add any punctuation needed.

- ____ 1. Our opponents were surprised by our victory but we were not.
- ____ 2. Our opponents were not alert however we were alert.
- ____ 3. Although I lost the game I know and understand the new rules.
- ____ 4. He goes to the beach whenever he can.
Whenever he can he goes to the beach.
- ____ 5. She studies hard consequently she makes good grades.
- ____ 6. The work was not only difficult but also unfair.
- ____ 7. Both the books and the papers were lost.
- ____ 8. If we are allowed to go everyone will be happy.
- ____ 9. Either Bill or Ed will make the trip.
- ____ 10. Not many fans went to the game but the team still won.
- ____ 11. It rained nevertheless we went to the game.
- ____ 12. Before the story ended he had solved the crime.
- ____ 13. Ed will drive his new car or he will rent a new car.
- ____ 14. Ed's books are old and soiled.
- ____ 15. Until you learn to respect the rules you will not be allowed to go.
- ____ 16. We must decide whether to go to stay at home.
- ____ 17. The beach was crowded also it looked like rain.
- ____ 18. Bill worked quickly but he worked accurately.
- ____ 19. As long as you are quiet you may study together.
- ____ 20. We buy popcorn whenever we go to the game.
- ____ 21. You may have the car provided you pay for the gas.
- ____ 22. So that the sun won't blind them the men wear glasses.

THE SEMICOLON

The semicolon (;) is stronger than the comma but weaker than the period. There are two most important uses of the semicolon:

1. Use a semicolon between two independent clauses closely related in meaning but not joined by a coordinating conjunction. (IC; IC)

Example: Jane was playing with her dolls; John was playing with his pistols.

2. Use a semicolon between two independent clauses when the second clause is joined to the first with a conjunctive adverb. (IC; CA, IC)

Examples:

The Grand Canyon was one of the first national parks; however, it is one of the most spectacular.

Most former mining towns in the west are now deserted; unfortunately, many have been vandalized.

Note: If a conjunctive adverb is moved from the beginning of the second independent clause into the middle of it, the conjunctive adverb is then preceded by a comma instead of a semicolon; the semicolon, however, remains between the independent clauses.

Example:

The Grand Canyon was one of the first national parks; it is still, however, one of the most spectacular.

Exercise: In the following sentences, add semicolons and commas where necessary.

1. The stapler is broken the box of paper clips is empty.
2. The ocean waves broke steadily over the shipwreck meanwhile the crew was stopped.
3. The video player blared constantly the books remained closed.
4. The tourists noticed the majestic sunset the dogs however noticed the garbage cans.
5. If you reach the bridge signal me once if you reach the tower signal me twice.
6. Although the war was over Stanley stayed in Paris.
7. The cameras were in place the director was ready.
8. When the referee blew the whistle the centerforward stopped the goalkeeper however tackled the centerforward.
9. The centerforward smashed the goalkeeper thus the fight began.
10. I just read that novel it is weird.
11. The group hiked for three days we were not however very tired.
12. The work in the office was quite simple all she was required to do was to answer the phone and do a little typing.

THE COLON

The main uses of the colon (:) are :

1. To indicate that something is to follow, especially a formal series, or a statement introduced by the following or as follows.

Examples:

- Here are the facts: the money was there five minutes before he entered the room; it was missing immediately after he left; the next day he bought a new suit, although he had previously spent all of his month's allowance.
 - If you want to read further on the subject, I would recommend the following: Menchen, *The American Language*; Baugh, *A History of the English Language*; and Bryant, *Modern English and its Heritage*.
2. Before a clause which is intended to explain or amplify the first.
 - The morning edition made clear the newspaper's stand: it would back the Republican candidate.
 3. Before a long or formal appositive.
 - She has always cared for one person: herself.
 4. In place of a comma before long or formal direct quotations;
 - In that speech Bryan said: "You shall not press upon the brow of labor a crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold";
 - This is his statement as reported in the newspapers: "I have never advocated such ideas; I do not advocate them now; I do not approve of them; and I have no reason for believing I ever will approve of them".

Exercise: In the following sentences, add commas, semicolons or colons where necessary:

1. His eyes went bad consequently he had to resign his position as a proofreader.
2. The difference between men and women is simple men earn the money and women spend it.
3. Students' interest in universities has declined and in some cases almost disappeared still there is great continuing need for change in higher education.
4. Over the piano was printed a notice please do not shoot the pianist.
5. This machine won't work therefore there is no sense in buying it.
6. Your car is new mine is eight years old.
7. The slogan went like this look sharp! Feel sharp! Be sharp!
8. This is a quotation from one of Keats' poems "A thing of beauty is a joy forever".
9. I had three chairs in my house one for solitude two for friendship and three for society (Thoreau).
10. A gentleman of our day is one who has money enough to do what every fool would do if he could afford it that is consume without producing.

THE DASH

The dash (--) should not be used as a general utility mark to substitute for the comma, period, semicolon, or colon. It is a specialized punctuation mark which serves the following purposes:

1. To stress a word or phrase at the end of a sentence especially appositives. Example:
And now it is my pleasure to present a man whom we all know and admire and to whom we are all deeply indebted -- Dr. Mason.
2. To sum up or complete an involved sentence. Example:
To live as free men in a free country; to enjoy the right to think and speak as we like; to feel that the state is the servant of its people; to be, even in a literal sense, a trustee and a partner in the conduct of a nation -- all this is what democracy means to us.
3. To set off a pronounced interruption. Example:
 - The boy -- he had been out playing playing in the street -- ran into the house crying bitterly about his lost toy.
 - This answer -- if we can call it an answer -- is completely meaningless.
4. To mark an interrupted or unfinished quotation.
 - « I'd like to, but I'm --, » he said.
 - « You're what? » I asked.
 - « Well, I'm -- I -- you see, I've never done anything like that before. »

THE HYPHEN

1. The hyphen (-) is used to form compound words that are not yet accepted as single words. The spelling of compound words that express a single idea passes through successive stages, originally spelled as two separate words, then as a hyphenated word, a compound word finally emerges as a single word

Base ball	became	base-ball	became	baseball
Post man	became	post-man	became	postman

2. To join two or more words serving as a single adjective before a noun.
Do not hyphenate such an adjective if it follows the verb as a predicate adjective.

A well-known speaker
The speaker was well known.

A greyish-green coat
The coat was greyish green.

3. To avoid an ambiguous or awkward union of letters.

Not belllike but bell-like
Not recreate but re-create (create anew)

In commonly used words, the hyphen is omitted.

Coeducational coordinate readdress.

4. To form compound numbers from twenty-one through ninety-nine, and separate the numerator from the denominator in written fractions.

Twenty-nine fifty-five two-thirds four-fifths

5. with the prefixes self-, all-, ex-, and the suffix -elect.

Self-important all-conference ex-mayor governor-elect

Do not capitalize the prefix ex- or the suffix -elect, even when used in titles that are essential parts of a name.

Ex-Mayor Kelly Governor-elect Jones ex-president Clinton

Exercise 1. : Insert hyphens and commas as needed.

1. In choosing a car you should remember that a well tuned motor is more important than white wall tires.
2. He boasts that he is self made and self educated but he forgets that he is also self centered.
3. The life long dream of most Americans is fulfilled when they move into a four bedroom house with a two car garage.
4. He changed a twenty dollar bill into twenty dollar bills and distributed them among the children.
5. In a well planned maneuver the students reentered the administration building and retook their position in the corridors.

Exercise 2 . Punctuate the following paragraph adding capitals when necessary:

Three concepts conflict difference and power control shake up most americans and they seem unable or unwilling to deal with them this stems in part from the fact that these concepts are antithetical to democracy to build a democratic society they must be dealt with . in a paper primarily about secondary education written several years ago i raised the question that perhaps if a society like ours takes the position that there is one abiding culture which dictates and structurally frames the activities of its members too little attention is paid to the differences among us and the result is conflict . That is to say may be students tend to perform well in school because the orientation which they bring to the school is antithetical to the model on which the school is built second the feeling set which emerges when there is a difference is so strong that more time is spent focusing on hostility and combat rather than on the educational process hence if a student is doing poorly socially and academically at school it may be because a condition of conflict exists there.

CAPITALIZATION

CAPITAL LETTERS ARE USED IN THE FOLLOWING CASES :

1. At the beginning of a sentence
2. For the pronoun I
Example: She lives in Rabat, and I live in Casablanca
3. For proper nouns and names of people
Examples: Mounir, William Shakespeare
4. For names of days and months
Example: Tuesday, Friday, April, December....
5. For geographical names, countries, cities, nationalities, races and religions
Examples: Atlantic Ocean, Atlas Mountains, Bou Regreg River, Oxford Street, Spain, French, Christianity....
Note that, used on their own, ocean, mountain, street and river are not capitalized
6. For historical periods, important events and calendar items
Examples: Middle Ages, Ice Age, World War II, Ramadan....
Note that, used on their own, age and war are not capitalized
7. For names of institutions, organizations and business companies
Examples: Ibn Tofail University, Tour Hassan Hotel, Supreme Court, United Nations, Maroc Telecom, used on their own, university, hotel, court and nation are not capitalized
8. For titles
Examples: Professor Smith, Prime Minister Blair, Mayor Johnson, Queen Elizabeth II, Chairman Arafat....
Note that, used on their own, professor, minister, mayor, queen and chairman are not capitalized
9. For titles of books, plays and works of art
Examples: Great Expectations, Animal Farm, Hamlet....
10. For abbreviations
Examples: PLO, FIFA, UNESCO.....