

## COMMAS MADE SIMPLE(R)

- Most people use TOO MANY COMMAS because they don't know when to use them, so they throw them in "to be on the safe side."
- Some people put them in whenever they think there's a "pause." This is a very unreliable and misleading way to punctuate your writing.
- Here are some solid guidelines to help you gain the confidence to use commas intelligently to make your writing easier to read and understand so that you will get your message across clearly and powerfully to your readers.

**Rule 1: Use a comma to separate day from year, town from state , in numbers of more than 3 digits, and at the opening and closing of letters or other messages.**

*Dates: Our country suffered an unforgettable attack on **September 11, 2001**.*

*Place names: Many of you live in **East Williston, New York**.*

*Numbers: The cheerleaders sold **1,000 tickets** to the opening game.*

*Letters: **Dear Mr. Ryan, .....Sincerely, Mr. Smith***

**Rule 2: Use a comma after an introductory clause, phrase, or other start to a sentence other than its subject.**

***Clause:** **Since it was raining out,** we took our umbrella.*

***Phrase:** **During the rainstorm,** we used our umbrella.*

***Other:** **Yesterday,** it was raining.*

**Rule 3A: Use commas to separate MORE THAN TWO items in a series (LISTS).**

*Sam packed **his toothbrush, some socks, his T-shirts, and a few shorts**.*

***Lions, tigers, bears, and elephants** gathered around our vehicle.*

**The only time you would leave out the last comma in a list is if the last 2 items are a unit, such as :**

*Macaroni and cheese/**Batman and Robin/ Rock and Roll***

**Rule 3B: Use commas to separate TWO OR MORE ADJECTIVES that come before a noun if you can reverse their order and it still sounds right.**

***(Test: can you put “and” between them?) IF THE ADJECTIVES HAVE TO STAY IN THE SAME ORDER AND YOU CAN’T PUT “AND” BETWEEN THEM, DON’T USE A COMMA.***

***Here, you DO NEED A COMMA:***

*The red, juicy apple tasted so delicious .*

***Here, you CAN NOT USE A COMMA:***

*The red sports car looked awesome.*

**Rule 4A: Use a comma with a coordinator/conjunction (FANBOYS) to join two full sentences.**

***This is when you have a subject and predicate on both sides of the coordinating conjunction.***

*My sister does very well in school, and my brother works hard to do just as well.*

***WHEN YOU JOIN A PART OF A SENTENCE to a full sentence, you DON’T USE A COMMA.***

*My sister does very well in school and in sports also.*

***YOU CAN’T USE JUST A COORDINATOR/CONJUNCTION TO JOIN TWO SENTENCES! This is called a run-on sentence.***

***WRONG!!*** *My sister does very well in school and my brother works hard too.*

***YOU CAN’T USE JUST A COMMA TO JOIN TWO SENTENCES! This is called a comma splice.***

***WRONG!!*** *My sister does very well in school, my brother works hard too.*

**Rule 4B: But YOU CAN USE A SEMI-COLON TO JOIN TWO SENTENCES.**

***RIGHT!!*** *My sister does very well in school; my brother works hard too.*

***NOTICE that both sides of the semi-colon are sentences that can stand on their own. BE careful to avoid using a semi-colon after an introductory clause. (see Rule 2—you just need a comma) Like this:***

***WRONG!!*** *Because she studies hard; my sister does well in school.*

***RIGHT!*** *Because she studies hard, my sister does well in school.*

**Rule 5:** Use a comma after any words spoken directly to someone, such as saying a person's name to get someone's attention when you are about to speak to him or her. If the person's name is mentioned at the end of the sentence, put a comma before the name.

*You will probably also need quotation marks.*

*"Mrs. Alvarez, I thought your speech was very convincing."*

*"Bob, are you coming with us?"*

*"I am very impressed with your work, class."*

*"I only meant to eat one cookie, Mom," Janie explained.*

**NOTICE THAT COMMAS ARE NOT NEEDED EVERY TIME A NAME IS MENTIONED.**

**WRONG!! Sarah, was not feeling well.**

**Rule 6A:** Use commas before and after all NON RESTRICTIVE elements (clauses, phrases, appositives, etc.). DON'T USE COMMAS around RESTRICTIVE elements.

**Hint: NO RESTRICT = YES COMMAS**

**YES RESTRICT = NO COMMAS**

***"To restrict" means to narrow down. So if the words following the subject are narrowing down or further defining or limiting the subject, then that group of words IS RESTRICTIVE. Therefore, NO COMMAS. If the words following the subject add info. but DO NOT LIMIT or restrict the subject or make it any more specific than it was already, then that group of words is NON-RESTRICTIVE. Therefore, YES COMMAS.***

*Wheatley teachers, who are employed by the East Williston School District, pay New York State taxes.*

*Wheatley teachers who give tons of homework are not usually the most popular teachers.*

*Mrs. Jensen, who teaches at Wheatley, is very popular with her students.*

***NOTICE: In the first example, the words after the subject refer to ALL Wheatley teachers, so they are not narrowing down or limiting. These words do NOT RESTRICT. Therefore, YES COMMAS.***

***In the second example, the words following the subject (hopefully) do not refer to ALL but only to SOME of the Wheatley teachers. So these words do narrow down the subject. These words DO RESTRICT. Therefore, NO COMMAS.***

***In the third example, the words following the subject cannot narrow down the subject since Mrs. Jensen is already just one person. These words add info. but do NOT RESTRICT. Therefore, YES COMMAS.***

**Rule 6B: Use commas before and after all interrupters.**

*These are words that could be called “rovers” because writers use them in many different positions in a sentence, depending on where they like them best, stylistically. They often appear at the start of a sentence, but a writer may move them to the end or even the middle of a sentence. When these words and phrases are “dropped” into the middle of a sentence, they become “INTERRUPTERS,” and a comma before and after helps the reader to notice them.*

*Your first assignment, **by the way**, can be found on the website.*

*Mary, **of course**, had to sit in the front seat with her mother.*

*The stock market, **however**, cannot offer any guarantees that your money will be safe.*

*My camp friends, **believe me**, are a lot more important than anyone else.*

*The issue of health care, **for example**, provoked much debate in Washington.*

**Rule 7: Use a comma to separate the speaker from the words spoken.**

*Ben **said**, “I’m not going.”*

*“I’m not **going**,” Ben **said**.*

*“I’m not **going**,” Ben **said**, “**because** I don’t want to go”*

**Rule 8: Remove all unnecessary commas. Unless a specific rule tells you to, DON’T JUST PUT IN RANDOM COMMAS.**