

Commas

1. Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction that joins independent clauses.

Everyone has heard of love at first sight, but I fell in love at first dance.

1a. Do not use a comma to separate compound elements that are not independent clauses.

A good money manager controls expenses and invests surplus dollars.

2. Use a comma after an introductory word group.

When Irwin was ready to eat, his cat jumped onto the table.

Excited about the move, Don and Alice began packing.

2a. The comma may be omitted if the introductory phrase is short and there is no danger of misinterpretation.

In no time we were at 28,000 feet.

3. Use a comma between all items in a series.

You can order fillet of rattlesnake, bison burgers, or pickled eel.

Activities include a search for treasure, dubious financial dealings, much discussion of ancient heresies, and midnight feasts.

4. Use a comma between coordinate adjectives not joined by a coordinating conjunction.

Mother has become a strong, confident, independent woman.

Robert is a warm, gentle, affectionate father.

4a. Do not use a comma between cumulative adjectives.

Three large grey shapes moved slowly toward us.

Ira ordered a rich chocolate layer cake.

5. Use commas to set off nonrestrictive word groups

The children needed sturdy shoes, which were expensive

The helicopter, with its 100,000-candlepower spotlight, circled above

5a. Do not use a comma with a restrictive word group

The children needed clothes that were washable.

One corner of the attic was filled with newspapers dating from the turn of the century.

6. Use commas to set off conjunctive adverbs, transitional expressions, parenthetical expressions, and contrasted elements

Natural foods are not always salt free; for example, celery contains more sodium than most people would imagine.

In fact, basketball was invented by James Naismith to hold the attention of students between football and baseball seasons.

Evolution, as far as we know, doesn't work this way.

Celia, unlike Robert, had no loathing for dance contests.

6a. If a transitional expression blends smoothly with the rest of the sentence, the comma can be omitted.

Bill's typewriter is broken; therefore you will need to borrow Sarah's.

7. Use commas to set off nouns of direct address, the words *yes* and *no*, and mild interjections

Forgive us, Dr. Spock, for doing that.

Yes, the loan will probably be approved.

Well, cases like these are hard to decide.

8. Use commas with expressions such as *he said* to set off direct quotations

"Convictions are more dangerous than lies," wrote Nietzsche.

9. Use commas with dates, addresses, and titles

On December 12, 1890, orders were sent out for his arrest.