

A Quick Guide to Comma Usage

Rule 1: The Serial Comma

Use this to punctuate a list of three or more elements

Formula: Item 1, Item 2, and Item 3.

- Gretchen needed to buy paper, pencils, and pens. (List of Words)
- John wants to go to college, graduate with his degree, and practice law. (List of Phrases)
- Humans are intelligent, humans possess technology, yet the roaches will out live us all. (List of Complete Sentences)

Rule 2: The Conjunction Comma

Use this to combine two complete sentences with the help of one of the FANBOYS.

FANBOYS= For And Nor But Or Yet So

Formula: Complete Sentence 1, {1 FANBOYS} Complete Sentence 2.

- Hardison did not want to visit the cemetery, for he had sad memories of it.

Rule 3: The “Introductory” Comma (Introductory Phrases)

Use this to separate introductory elements in the beginning of a sentence.

Formula: Introductory Element, Complete Sentence.

- Depending on the scope of the paper, the page length for the final paper may vary.

*Note: With introductory phrases that are relatively short, this comma can be omitted; however, omit carefully!

Rule 4: The “Aside” Comma (Parenthetical/Appositive Punctuation)

Use this to separate extra information that is non-essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Formula: Beginning of Sentence, {Interrupting Information} Rest of Sentence.

- James, typically an extremely paranoid person, did not bother to check the locks tonight.

*Note: The interrupting information can occur almost anywhere in a sentence.

Rule 5: “The Quotation” Comma

Use this to introduce quotations.

Formula: Signal Phrase, “Quotation.”

- According to Smith, “the legend of King Arthur did not originally include the character named Sir Lancelot.”
- Smith writes, the legend of King Arthur did not originally include the character named Sir Lancelot.”