



Correct Comma Use

Commas are the most common form of punctuation in English sentences. When they are used correctly, they create a clear path for the reader through your writing. Here are the rules to follow in using commas.

The Independent Clause Rule*: When joining independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction, a comma is placed after each independent clause, before the coordinating conjunction. (The seven coordinating conjunctions are *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* – also known as “fanboys”.)

Example: We thought we had lost the dog, **but** soon we heard him barking.

The Dependent Clause Rule:** When a dependent clause is joined to an independent clause with a subordinating conjunction, a comma is placed either before the conjunction or at the end of the dependent clause.

Example: We were enjoying the outdoor concert, **even though** rain was falling.
Because the gym was crowded, the students chose to play on an outdoor court.

Introductory Material Rule: When a word, phrase, or clause comes before an independent clause, a comma is placed after the introductory material.

Example: In the middle of the night, snow started to fall.
Listening to the evening news, John grew quiet.

The Interrupter Rule: When interrupting material is inserted within an independent or dependent clause, the material is set off from the rest of the clause with commas. This interrupting material is not essential to the grammatical structure of the clause nor is it necessary for understanding the sentence.

Example: That group of books, on the other hand, is ready for immediate sale.
The Martins’ children, all three of them, play the piano well.

Items in a Series Rule: Commas are placed after each item in a series. (If you can insert *and* into the series, a comma is necessary.)

Example: We hurriedly assembled the food, volleyball equipment, and banners.
The students ate the pizza that included mushrooms, pepperoni, and peppers.

Coordinate Adjectives Rule: Multiple adjectives describing a single noun are separated by commas.

Example: The happy, hungry, muddy puppy made his way across the new, white, expensive rug.

*An **independent clause** is the technical term referring to a complete sentence. The structure of an independent clause is subject + verb (+ object).

A **dependent clause has the same grammatical structure as an independent clause, but it is preceded by a subordinating conjunction (such as *although, because, while, etc.*).