



Let's talk about commas

A-State Online Writing Center

Comma Dos

We would be lying if we said we haven't all battled with commas, regardless of the assignment or discipline. Whether there are too many added commas or not enough, countless students forget the specific rules for using them. In writing, commas have the most uses and are utilized more than many other punctuation marks. Below, we will show you how to use commas in academic writing.

- Use commas after an “introductory” word or phrase. In “How to Write Anything,” John Ruszkiewicz describes introductory “word groups” as “descriptive phrases or clauses that open a sentence” (531).
 - **Example: During my shift, the manager asked me to train a new employee.**
 - **Example: After studying, I made an A on the exam.**
 - For shorter phrases, an author can make the executive decision whether or not to use a comma; however, the choice to leave it in will help the reader move through your text.
- Use commas after transitions. If a transition is used in the middle of a sentence, isolate it with commas.

- **Example: In conclusion,** recent studies concluded that smoking is a health hazard.
- Use commas to isolate appositives. An appositive adds extra information for the reader, but it will not change the meaning of the sentence when removed.
 - **Example: Arkansas State University,** the home of the Red Wolves, **has its main campus in Jonesboro, Arkansas.**
 - The sentence without an appositive, “Arkansas State University has its main campus in Jonesboro, Arkansas,” still has the same meaning as the first sentence.
- Use commas when making a list of three or more items.
 - **Example: She couldn’t decide if she wanted to major in Music,** Nursing, **or English.**
 - **Example: His day consisted of going to class,** working an evening shift, **and finding time to finish an essay before the midnight deadline.**
- Use a comma and conjunction to separate independent clauses. Conjunctions are words such as **and, but, or, because, so, and yet**. Placing the comma here without a conjunction will create a comma splice, so always double-check your sentences for it.
 - **Example: Jackson’s computer died,** so he had to go to the library to finish his project.
 - This comma rule helps keeps thoughts and ideas together without separating them into two sentences. Without this rule, sentences would become choppy, and the text wouldn’t have the flow it needs to move the reader through it. You can hear this when you read the sentence above out

loud with the rules in place, then go on to read the same sentence below without that rule.

- **Jackson's computer died. He had to go to the library to finish his project.**
- Use commas after conjunctive adverbs. These are adverbs acting as conjunctions, for example, **however, finally, furthermore, indeed, meanwhile, nevertheless, and fortunately.**
 - **Example: Jeffrey didn't get much time to study for the Biology exam; however, he impressed himself by making an A.**
- Use commas to isolate parenthetical expressions; this provides information or internal thought that isn't essential to the text.
 - **Example: That used car, if you get a good deal, should cost about \$5000.**
- Isolate with commas when adjectives come after nouns.
 - **Example: Our psychology professor, incredibly understanding and highly adaptable, gave me an extension on the project.**
- Use commas when directly addressing someone.
 - **Example: Andrea, you haven't completed your final essay.**
- Use a comma to connect multiple adjectives.
 - **Example: He was a studious, inquisitive, intelligent student.**