

Commas

Commas for a list

-Use commas to separate more than two items in a list. The general rule here is that the comma is correct if it can be replaced by the word *and* or *or*.

Ex: Tristan went to the store and bought peaches, chipotle sauce, and twelve sticks of margarine. He then drove home, fed his albino parakeet, and did 3,000 jumping jacks before going to bed.

-When using commas for a list, one does not necessarily have to include a comma before the *and* and the final item

Ex: Brandon loves unicorns, rainbows, cheese-whiz and tennis.

-One needs to be careful however, there are times when omitting the final comma can alter the meaning of the sentence.

Ex: The advertisement for the Nicole's Gas Station and Mini-Mart read: "Shop now, save money, eat here and get gas."

-When you read closely, leaving the comma out before *and get gas*, completely changes the meaning of the sentence. Where the advertisement wants consumers to know that they can grab a snack and get their car filled up with one convenient stop, the omitted comma makes it sound like eating there *will give you gas!*...now who wants that?

-The rule of thumb for the above situation is: when in doubt, add the comma—you can never be wrong.

Commas to split two adjectives

-Like using commas to separate items in a list, a comma can be used to separate two adjectives. The rule here is also similar to using commas for a list—if the comma can be replaced with the word *and*, then you are doing it correctly.

Ex: Sarah's uncle Jordan is a tall, bearded man.
(Sarah's uncle Jordan is a tall and bearded man.)

Commas for joining

-Commas are used when two complete ideas are joined together, but only when conjunctions like *and*, *or*, *but*, *while*, and *yet* are used.

Ex: Lauren and Shauna planned to run 7 miles today, or go to the mall.

Ex: Colin and Casey were sure they received the highest grade on their project, but Dylan and Bradley proved them wrong.

-If none of those conjunctions are used and there is a need to combine or link two complete sentences, a semicolon is used.

Ex: Nobody wanted to sit next to Blake; he always smells like moldy French toast.

Commas for filling gaps

-Here's one that doesn't come up too much. Commas are sometimes used to add style to a sentence and take the place of missing words.

Ex: Bradley smelled like tires; David, dirt.

Commas before direct speech or quotations

-This is a useful one, especially for essays where you are using textual evidence to support your answer. Use a comma to move from a lead-in into a direct quote.

Ex: Early in the book, before Gherig and Sam leave for Oklahoma, Edwin turns to Eric and says, "Gee man, I sure love string-cheese."

Commas to set off interjections

-An interjection is a word that expresses emotion and has no grammatical relation to the rest of the sentence. Use commas to separate an interjection from the rest of the sentence

Ex: Shelby accidentally got her finger stuck in the pencil sharpener and, boy-o-boy, it hurt!

Ex: Wow, who knew that Chris and Forrest was such phenomenal speed skaters?

Commas to set off additional information

-Similar to how a comma can be used to set off an interjection, commas can also be used to set off clarifying information or transitions that, if removed (the info), does not interfere with the sentence's readability.

Ex: However, Ejmin refused the offer and decided to take the other job.

Ex: Before heading home, Rita decided it would be a good idea to stop and surprise her parents with a new puppy.

Ex: Not that she really cared for rap that much, but Megan really loved the new Snoop album.

Ex: Just like Donny, Tyler and Stuart loved ballroom dancing.

Ex: Before the second quarter even ended, Adam scored 37 touchdowns.

-This can also be done mid-sentence, using a pair of commas.

Ex: Brittney, who had never been tardy to class, surprised everyone and showed up 11 minutes late to first period.

Ex: Kyle chuckled and thought to himself, "I am, of course, the best looking person ever to exist...why shouldn't I be able to become a professional model?"

Ex: Shelby published her first, and widely acclaimed, novel, The Adventures of Jimmy the Exploder, when she was only 17.

-If you are not sure you are doing it correctly, see if you can remove the commas and the information between them. If the sentence still makes sense, then you are doing it right.

-With that said, sometimes the sentence can still work. Just be sure to read the sentence carefully and make sure it means what you want it to mean. Look at the difference in meaning between the following two sentences.

Ex: The suspect thought the judge was crazy.

Vs.

