

# Commas

## RULES

1. Divide items in a list. *	<i>Items must be of the same type: verbs of the same tense, all nouns, etc.</i>	I like eating chocolate, drinking red wine and reading books. He eats, shoots, and leaves. ( <i>all verbs</i> )
2. Separate independent clauses with these conjunctions: <i>and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet</i> .		He would like to go, but he is feeling ill. They hadn't behaved, so they went to bed without dinner.
3. Surround a phrase in the middle of a sentence that is bonus information - not essential to the meaning of the sentence.	<i>Don't use commas on essential information: Students who cheat only harm themselves.</i>	Jack, who had hated steak for years, only ate the salad. Oranges, which are my favourite fruit, make a lovely cake. Jane, the manager of the team, was sick for a week.
4. Use <b>after</b> an introductory clause/phrase.	<i>But not when the dependent clause follows the main: The post came while she was sleeping.</i>	While she was sleeping, the post came. When the specification is finished, we'll discuss dates.
5. Separate co-ordinate adjectives.	<i>Check if you can add 'and' instead of the comma.</i>	They were active, friendly children. She often wore a thin, black wool jumper.
6. Set apart phrases that refer to the beginning/middle of the sentence.	<i>Free modifiers can be placed anywhere in the sentence without changing its meaning.</i>	Janet stared at the screen, rubbing her temples.
7. Use to prevent misunderstandings.		To Michael, Jackson was a role model.
8. Separate names, numbers, and days.	<i>Especially for place names and dates.</i>	The storm will hit Melbourne, Australia on Thursday, February 14, 2014 at 7pm.
9. Replace a word or phrase.	<i>Not used in written business English.</i>	Tuesday was rainy and cold; Thursday, hot and sunny.
10. Make interjections stand out.	<i>Not used in written business English.</i>	Hang on, here's the file you wanted.
11. Use before direct speech.	<i>Not used in written business English.</i>	John said in a soft voice, "You don't have to go, you know."

\* The Oxford comma, also known as the serial or Harvard comma, may or may not be used before the final item in the list. It's up to you!

**Extra Commas:** You can occasionally use extra commas to indicate a pause for breath, but only when it doesn't interfere with the meaning of the sentence.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- Eats, Shoots, and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation by Lynne Truss, also available as a workbook
- The Elements of Style by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White
- Purdue Online Writing Lab: Commas, explanation and exercises, <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/exercises/3/5>
- Grammar Girl: Where do I use commas? <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/where-do-i-use-commas>