

## COMMAS

One of the more common marks of punctuation is the **comma**. Commas produce clarity by separating information. Commas also help writers to establish pace.

Usually, less punctuation is preferable to more punctuation, but there are five situations in which you should use commas.

### 5 RULES FOR COMMA USE

1. Use a comma between elements in a list of three or more.

My favorite sports are football, baseball, and basketball.

2. Use a comma where an independent clause (complete sentence) meets a dependent clause (incomplete sentence).

Although I worked hard, I lost my job.

3. Use a comma between independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS = for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

Dogs are very loyal, but they also bark and bite.

4. Use a comma to set off appositive phrases and nonessential information (the sentence would be complete and clear were that information between commas deleted).

Keith Hernandez, the greatest defensive first baseman in history, retired after the 1990 season.

5. Use a comma between *multiple adjacent adjectives*.

He is a dishonest, vile man.

There is a subjective component to commas as well. Sometimes, for stylistic reasons, and to control pace, writers place commas where **pauses** are needed. So if you think a pause is necessary, use a comma, but be careful not to overuse commas because they can break the rhythm of your writing. And always avoid the comma splice.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A comma splice occurs when a comma splices (joins) two independent clauses (complete sentences). Example: You are nice, I like you very much.

## EXERCISE on Comma Rules

**Directions:** Identify which of the above rules (1-5) describes the comma use in each sentence.

**Example:** I don't like grammar, but I will study it anyway. #3

1. If you won't apologize, I will end you. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Remember to floss, brush, and rinse in order to keep your teeth and gums healthy.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Felix is a neat freak, but Oscar is a slob. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Stradlater, Holden Caulfield's roommate at Pencey Prep, is a vain kid and a secret slob.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Derek Jeter, the Yankees all-time hits leader, may very well be the greatest short stop ever.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Hank Aaron is among the top five players in home runs, hits, runs batted in, and runs scored. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Complaining about homework, whining about tests, and not paying attention in class are just a few of the more annoying characteristics of our least favorite students.  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Since you didn't revise, you can't earn a high grade on the essay. \_\_\_\_\_
9. The student exceeded the absence limit, so she will not pass the class.  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Commas are frustrating, confusing marks of punctuation. \_\_\_\_\_

## EXERCISE ON Commas in Context

**Directions:** Select the response that corresponds to the best use of comma.

1. Even though I want to hang out I'm staying home to practice my grammar.
  - A. Add a comma after *out*
  - B. Add a comma after *to*
  
2. My mother couldn't attend my poetry recitation, because she was ill.
  - A. Remove the comma before *because*
  - B. Add a comma after *because*
  
3. My brothers, and my sister will be coming to Thanksgiving dinner.
  - A. Add a comma after *coming*
  - B. Remove the comma after *brothers*
  
4. July, the warmest month of the year is also the month of my birth.
  - A. Remove the comma after *July*
  - B. Add a comma after *year*
  
5. Everyone wants to go to Disney the fun capital of the world.
  - A. Add a comma after *Disney*
  - B. Add a comma after *capital*
  
6. My favorite rides at Disney are Space Mountain, Splash Mountain and the Haunted House.
  - A. Add a comma after *Disney*
  - B. Add a comma before *and*
  
7. The bog turtle, the smallest turtle in the world, thrives in the boggy areas of the northeast United States.
  - A. Delete the comma after *world*
  - B. No change
  
8. If you want to find a snapping turtle look near the bottom of the pond.
  - A. Add a comma after *bottom*
  - B. Add a comma after *turtle*

9. Frogs tend to be more aquatic than toads, but frogs will occasionally come on land to hunt insects.

- A. Delete the comma before *but*
- B. No change

10. Use commas between dependent and independent clauses, and to separate elements in a list.

- A. Delete the comma after *clauses*
- B. Add a comma before and after the *and* that's between *independent* and *dependent*