

KYLE BISHOP
COMMA REVIEW

When to Use a Comma

1. Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining independent clauses.
 - ★ Margaret needs to find an apartment, and she needs to earn the money to pay for it.
2. Use a comma after an introductory word group.
 - a. After a subordinate (dependent) clause
 - ★ If you have the time, I can help you Friday.
 - b. After prepositional phrases
 - ★ Next to the car in my garage, I keep an old case of Dutch chocolates.
 - c. After participial or infinitive phrases
 - ★ Running to catch his train, Cid dropped his briefcase.
 - ★ To get a passing grade, Shannon studied during the Thanksgiving break.
3. Use a comma between **all** items in a series (use an “Oxford Comma”).
 - ★ My favorite type of food is Mexican, Italian, or Chinese.
 - ★ We need to organize the party, send out the invitations, and order the food.
4. Use a comma between coordinate adjectives not joined by *and*; do not use a comma between cumulative adjectives.
 - ★ I didn’t have time to read that long, boring book.
 - ★ My friend Miles just bought three Schnauzer puppies.
5. Use commas to set off nonrestrictive elements; do not use commas to set off restrictive elements.
 - a. Adjective clauses
 - NONRESTRICTIVE: Janet’s new red car, which she just bought, was totaled.
 - RESTRICTIVE: The car that Janet just bought was totaled.
 - b. Phrases functioning as adjectives
 - NONRESTRICTIVE: My room, needing a good cleaning, was a total mess.
 - RESTRICTIVE: The room needing a good cleaning is a mess.

c. Appositives

NONRESTRICTIVE: My only brother, Joe, went with us to the movie.

RESTRICTIVE: My brother Joe went with us to the movie.

6. Use commas to set off transitional and parenthetical expressions, absolute phrases, and contrasted elements.

a. Transitional expressions

★ Stocks are high; therefore, the liquidation of our assets is not necessary.

★ As mentioned, we don't necessarily need more funding.

b. Parenthetical expressions

★ My truck, on the other hand, could easily handle the load.

c. Absolute phrases

★ Your father being a physician, I decided to call him right away.

d. Contrasted elements

★ We need sold-out shows, not more stand-by tickets.

7. Use commas to set off nouns of direct address, the words *yes* and *no*, interrogative tags, and mild interjections.

★ I was wondering, Sally, if you had time to check the latest figures?

★ Yes, I think we can make that request happen.

★ We all found the concert to be enjoyable, isn't that right?

★ Well, I think I'll go downtown and catch the latest show.

8. Use commas with expression such as *he said* to set off direct quotations.

★ John Fitzgerald has stated, "The right to win is a right to live."

9. Use commas with dates, addresses, titles, and numbers.

★ On March 26, 2001, I found the right job at just the right time.

★ We bought a summer home in Aspen, Colorado, just after I retired.

★ Mr. Jay Morgan, Ph.D., will be giving the lecture this week.

★ Current enrollment is 15,435 students, which puts us third in the region.

10. Use a comma to prevent confusion.

★ What this is, is a failure to communicate.

When Not to Use a Comma

1. Do not use a comma between compound elements that are not independent clauses.
 - ★ Walter needs to pick up Larry and get to the bowling alley by 8 p.m.
2. Do not use a comma to separate a verb from its subject or object.
 - ★ The student in need of the most help should spend the most time studying.
3. Do not use a comma before the first or after the last item in a series.
 - ★ We need to deal with problems of staffing, benefits, and pay at the next meeting.
4. Do not use a comma between cumulative adjectives, between an adjective and a noun, or between an adverb and an adjective.
 - ★ We are trying to buy a new sports car.
 - ★ Have you seen the old, wrinkled, tacky suit of Abram's?
 - ★ I have a newly acquired television set to show you all.
5. Do not use commas to set off restrictive or mildly parenthetical elements.
 - ★ Those who want to get the best seats will come to the show early.
 - ★ I will therefore leave my house at 5:30.
6. Do not use a comma to set off a concluding adverb clause (subordinating/dependent clause) that is essential to the meaning of the sentence.
 - ★ She won't be there since you forgot to tell her where we were meeting!
7. Avoid other misuses of the comma:
 - a. After a coordinating conjunction
 - b. After *such as* or *like*
 - c. Before *than*
 - d. After *although*
 - e. Before a parenthesis
 - f. To set off an indirect (reported) quotation
 - g. With a question mark or an exclamation point