

Comma Rules

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RULEEXAMPLE

1. Use a comma to separate the parts of a compound sentence.
 - a. Your answers are correct, but you did the wrong exercise.
 - b. Roberto's wife liked the appliance, and he liked the price.
2. Use a comma to set off an introductory clause or phrases or words.
 - a. If I don't learn English this semester, I will be very unhappy.
 - b. While talking to Jean about her plans, I found out that she is going to Hawaii.
3. Use a comma between 3 or more words in a series when no conjunctions have been used.
 - a. Rats need places to hide, to nest, and to breed.
 - b. My favorite sports are swimming, tennis, and skiing.
4. Use a comma to set off words such as yes, no, well, and however at the beginning of a sentence.
 - a. Furthermore, I don't have enough money for the trip.
 - b. No, I have not traveled in Mexico.
5. Use a comma to set off parenthetical words and phrases which interrupt the sentence with information that is nonessential.
 - a. You are, of course, planning to attend the convention.
 - b. Some Americans, however, use chopsticks when they eat Chinese food.
6. Use a comma to set off a noun of direct address.
 - a. Bill, please pass the potatoes.
 - b. I'm sorry, Mr. Gomez, but Dr. Jones isn't in right now.
7. Use a comma to set off appositives, words that rename nouns.
 - a. The Mississippi River, the great river of North America, pours into the Gulf of Mexico.
 - b. Miss Lark, our English teacher, comes from Maine.
8. Use a comma to set off the items in an address. (Note that there is no comma between the state and the zip code).
 - a. Payments should be mailed to National Acceptance Company, 4150 Riverside Drive, Cincinnati, Ohio 45201, before the first of the month.
 - b. The building at 33 West Street, Buffalo, New York, has been sold.
9. Use a comma to set off the items in a date. (No comma needed if the date is inverted or if only the month and year are given, e.g., 2 June 2010 or June 2010.)
 - a. On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.
 - b. I paid the bill on Monday, May 3, 1982.
10. Use a comma to separate modifiers (adjectives), the order of which can be switched.
 - a. It was a warm, sunny day.
 - b. Have you seen that red-haired, freckle-faced teenager?
11. Use a comma to set off a nonrestrictive clause, a group of words which describes a noun and is not essential to the meaning of the sentence.
 - a. Mrs. Brown, who liked the book, recommended it to me.
 - b. The tiger, which was driven mad by hunger, killed the sheep.
12. Use a comma to set off a "tag" question (added at the end of a sentence to imply a yes or no answer).
 - a. You're going to study these rules, aren't you?
 - b. Class has been cancelled, right?
13. Use commas with direct quotations. (Note the variations.)
 - a. The student said, "I must study these comma rules."
 - b. "I must study these comma rules," the student said.
 - c. "I must study," the student said, "because we have a quiz."
 - d. "Don't interrupt me! I'm studying!" the student shouted.
 - e. "Do I have to study this?" the student asked.