

Language Mechanics Handout 074

Comma Rules and Practice

RULE

1. Use a comma to separate the parts of a compound sentence.
2. Use a comma to set off an introductory clause or phrases or words.
3. Use a comma between 3 or more words in a series when no conjunctions are used.
4. Use a comma to set off words like yes, no, well, and however at the beginning.
5. Use a comma to set off parenthetical words and phrases that interrupt the sentence with nonessential information.
6. Use a comma to set off a noun of direct address.
7. Use a comma to set off appositives, words that rename nouns.
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).
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.)
10. Use a comma to separate modifiers (adjectives.) Their order can be switched.
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.
12. Use a comma to set off a “tag” question that implies a yes or no answer.
13. Use commas with direct quotations. (Note the variations.)

EXAMPLE

- a. Your answers are correct, but you did the wrong exercise.
- b. Roberto’s wife liked the appliance, and he liked the price.
- a. If I don’t learn English this semester, I will be unhappy.
- b. While talking to Jean about her plans, I found out that she is going to Hawaii.
- a. Rats need places to hide, to nest, and to breed.
- b. My favorite sports are swimming, tennis, and skiing.
- a. Furthermore, I don’t have enough money for the trip.
- b. No, I have not traveled in Mexico.
- a. You are, of course, planning to attend the convention.
- b. Some Americans, however, use chopsticks when they eat Chinese food.
- a. Bill, please pass the potatoes.
- b. I’m sorry, Mr. Gomez, but Dr. Jones isn’t in right now.
- 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.
- 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, is sold.
- a. On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.
- b. I paid the bill on Monday, May 3, 1982.
- a. It was a warm, sunny day.
- b. Have you seen that red-haired, freckle-faced teenager?
- a. Mrs. Brown, who liked the book, recommended it to me.
- b. The tiger, which was driven mad by hunger, killed the sheep.
- a. You’re going to study these rules, aren’t you?
- b. Class has been cancelled, right?
- 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.

Worksheet for Comma Rules

- Rule 1:
1. That wall clock looks expensive but it doesn't work.
 2. He likes to buy expensive clothes but hates to pay the bills.
 3. The lights went out so the guests had to leave early.
 4. The store will have to stay open longer or it will lose money.
 5. John has a large garden for he loves to grow vegetables.
- Rule 2:
1. When the snow stopped we were able to leave.
 2. As the stage curtain rose the audience clapped.
 3. We stayed on the beach until the sun went down.
 4. Although English is offered only in the mornings you can take chemistry at night.
 5. I am going to bed early tonight because I am tired.
- Rule 2:
1. Wagging his tail the puppy barked with excitement.
 2. Ignored by the policeman the town drunk always slept in the park.
 3. By four in the afternoon everyone wanted to go home.
 4. During the power blackout people tried to help each other.
 5. Near the end of the driveway we planted a lilac bush.
- Rule 3:
1. The woman of the 1990's often tries to be a wife a mother and a career woman.
 2. The police found TV sets blenders and hair dryers in the abandoned car.
 3. Bill wants to go to the shore to the mountains or to Disney World for his summer vacation.
 4. I will be happy to read your poem comment on it and return it to you.
 5. I enjoy biking and skating and swimming.
- Rule 4:
1. No I don't want any more ice cream
 2. Reluctantly the students left the classroom at the end of the summer.
 3. Well what have you been up to?
 4. I like tea. Therefore I drink at least three cups every day.
 5. Oh I love the mountains in the spring!
- Rule 5:
1. General Marsh it seemed to me trusted only one or two people.
 2. These apples believe it or not were grown in my backyard.
 3. Birthdays and anniversaries for example are special occasions.
 4. Instructors however receive a lower salary than professors.
 5. All twelve jurors by the way felt that the man was innocent.

- Rule 6:
1. Tom where did you put my books?
 2. Connie have you ever gone hiking?
 3. The class feels Professor Crow that you deserve an award.
 4. We all agree Dr. Caxton that you are the right man for the job.
 5. And now ladies and gentlemen we will begin the show.
- Rule 7:
1. Belinda a student of foreign languages speaks French and Spanish.
 2. Alaska the largest state in our country contains many surprises for the tourist.
 3. My friend Bill owns two stereos.
 4. Watch out for Phil a man whose ambition rules him.
 5. This is her favorite food ketchup sandwiches.
- Rules 8 & 9:
1. By May 1 2009 Susan will have a bachelor's degree.
 2. A new store opened at 300 North Road San Jose California 73002.
 3. People in Charleston South Carolina are very friendly toward visitors.
 4. In December 1977 I received my first Christmas gift.
 5. My teacher taught in London England from September 1 1982 to June 15 1983.
- Rule 10:
1. He gave a short interesting speech.
 2. The three young children were playing on the swing set.
 3. The children were screaming in scared high voices.
 4. The intelligent young man was wearing a bright orange vest.
 5. The bright creative woman was his wife.
- Rule 11:
1. My next-door neighbor who spends a lot of time at the gym is in excellent shape.
 2. Most patients prefer doctors who spend time listening to them.
 3. Many people who want to buy homes have found the interest rates too high.
 4. Stamp collecting which teaches a great deal about history is also fun.
 5. Everyone admires Larry who always sees the bright side of a bad situation.
- Rule 12:
1. It wasn't the right key was it?
 2. He's coming isn't he?
 3. The movie starts at eight doesn't it?
 4. You thought the pie was delicious didn't you?
 5. We have the right to complain don't we?

- Rule 13:
1. He asked “Who’s there?”
 2. “No” she insisted “there are monsters under the bed.”
 3. Henry said “I’m looking for a wife.”
 4. We heard someone shouting “Hello!”
 5. “You have lied” the judge said.

EXERCISE

Place commas wherever they are needed in the following passage; then check your answers.

There once was a handsome hairy monster who lived alone in a huge ivy-covered castle on a dreary hill. He was quite lonely so he spent much of his time in his garden because he loved flowers. The flowers were happy too. The monster also liked to stomp around the garden. Every day he would go to the garden and stomp from dawn to dusk.

Then one day the monster did not come to the garden. By some unknown magic he had turned into a knight who wanted to seek adventures in distant places. As the days and weeks passed the flowers were very sad for there was no longer anyone to care for them. The daisies pansies and violets cried. They especially missed the stomping of their friend.

Sasha a good fairy who loved flowers did a wonderful thing. She made a statue of the monster and placed it in the middle of the flower garden. In addition she gave the statue the power to come to life one day each summer. For the whole day the monster would stomp and make the flowers happy. To this very day the same thing happens once a year. If you know where to look therefore you may be able to see the monster stomping among the flowers.