

Grammar Practice: Commas

Check the categories below to see when a comma is appropriate. If one of the rules on this page does not explain why you need a particular comma, chances are you don't need one at all.

Introductory Words & Phrases: Put a comma after a word or phrase that introduces a sentence or clause.

Examples:

On the weekend before my final, I studied for two days straight.

Accordingly, I got an A on my exam

I did not expect to get the extra-credit question right; however, I did.

Interrupters: Put commas around words or phrases that interrupt the natural flow of the sentence.

Examples:

I hope, of course, that I get an A on my exam.

A grade of A, the teacher explained, has to be earned.

I will, therefore, have to study even harder.

Names: Set off the name of a person spoken to with commas.

Examples:

Yes, Joe, I'd love to go to the movies with you.

Jenny, did you finish your essay yet?

Modifiers: Modifiers that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence should be set off with commas.

Example:

Tell the students, who failed the example, that they will have to retake the course. (All students failed the example and all my retake the course.)

Modifiers that are essential do not require commas.

Example:

Tell the students who failed the exam that they will have to retake the course. (Only the students who failed must retake the course.)

Dates: When two numbers or words appear together in a date, separate them with commas. When a date with a year is in a sentence that continues, put a comma after the year.

Example:

Tuesday, April 26, 2005

Tuesday 26 April 2005

On April 26, 2005, you will take your final exam.

Place Names: Put a comma between a city and state or a city and country. If the sentence continues, also put a comma after the state or country.

Example:
Orlando, Florida, is a great place to live.

Series: Use commas to separate three or more items in a series (list). Remember, there should always be a comma before the final “and.”

Example:
Next semester, I plan to take French, English, and biology.

Compound Sentences: Put a comma before a **coordinating conjunction (cc)** when it is joining two independent clauses (IC).

IC, cc IC

Complex Sentences: Put a comma after a **dependent clause (DC)** when the dependent clause *begins* a sentence.

DC, IC

*For more information on compound and complex sentences, please see the tip sheet on **Coordination and***

Practice

Directions: Add commas to the following sentences using the guide above.

1. When I move to Chicago Illinois I will visit Al Capone’s restaurant.
2. I have four cats named Whiskers Gus Pumpkin and Shawn.
3. No Grandma the air conditioning is not broken.
4. Because the avocado turned brown I cannot eat it.
5. The mailman who also happened to be a retired police officer noticed the window of the house had been shattered.
6. Eventually the howling wind subsided and the old woman fell asleep.
7. The day was Friday October 13 1980.
8. Jenny would of course take the trash out before night fall.

Answer Key: 1. Place Names and Complex Sentence 2. Series 3. Names 4. Complex Sentence 5. Modifier 6. Introductory Word 7. Date 8. Interrupters

Read the choices below, and choose the answers with the appropriate use of commas for the underlined portions of each sentence. If the sentence contains no error, choose "No change is necessary."

1. From the balcony, Ellen could see ^A sparrows picking ^B up seeds, ^C berries, and insects.
A. sparrows, picking
B. up seeds,
C. berries and
D. No change is necessary.
2. After ^A seeing a re-run of Twister on ^B TV, Andy looked up ^C "tornado," on the Internet.
A. seeing, a
B. TV Andy
C. "tornado" on
D. No change is necessary.
3. ^A Josh, have ^B you, seen the beautiful ^C collection of African masks in the campus gallery?
A. Josh have
B. you seen
C. collection, of
D. No change is necessary.
4. ^A Mrs. Quinones, Carla's second grade ^B teacher, began ^C reading, The Wizard of Oz today.
A. Mrs. Quinones Carla's
B. teacher began
C. reading The
D. No change is necessary.
5. The Rocky ^A Mountains, Lassure ^B you, are one of the best places to ^C hike, and fish.
A. Mountains I
B. you are
C. hike and
D. No change is necessary.
6. Franco's parents ^A moved to the United ^B States on June 11, ^C 1984 and bought a house.
A. moved, to
B. States, on
C. 1984, and
D. No change is necessary.
7. Brenda's check was ^A sent to 112 Avalon ^B Court, Casselberry, and should ^C arrive today.
A. sent, to
B. Court Casselberry and
C. arrive, today
D. No change is necessary.

8. ~~A~~ Hal loves to relax in the ~~B~~ backyard and read Emily ~~C~~ Dickinson his favorite poet.
 A. Hal, loves
 B. backyard, and
 C. Dickinson, his
 D. No change is necessary.
9. As a matter of ~~A~~ fact, David both ~~B~~ bahaia and ~~C~~ St. Augustine grass require much care.
 A. fact, David, both
 B. bahaia, and
 C. St. Augustine, grass
 D. No change is necessary.
- ~~10.~~ ~~A~~ Zeus, father of many of the Greek ~~B~~ gods, was the brother of ~~C~~ Poseidon, god of the sea.
 A. Zeus father
 B. gods was
 C. Poseidon god
 D. No change is necessary.
11. Mohammed grew ~~A~~ up in ~~B~~ Tehran Iran where he learned to play ~~C~~ soccer, golf, and tennis.
 A. up, in
 B. Tehran, Iran, where
 C. soccer, golf and tennis
 D. No change is necessary.
12. The ~~best~~ ~~A~~ driver, Michael ~~B~~ Calahan, jammed his car into ~~C~~ gear, and raced down the track.
 A. driver Michael
 B. Calahan jammed
 C. gear and
 D. No change is necessary.
13. His ~~left~~ ~~A~~ cheek twitching as ~~B~~ usual, he sat there in ~~C~~ silence and waited for her to stop talking.
 A. cheek, twitching
 B. usual he
 C. silence, and
 D. No change is necessary.
14. ~~Our~~ ~~A~~ family, always seeking new places to ~~B~~ eat decided to try a new Thai ~~C~~ restaurant in Longwood.
 A. family always
 B. eat, decided
 C. restaurant, in
 D. No change is necessary.
- ~~15.~~ ~~A~~ Lincoln, the sixteenth ~~B~~ President, freed the slaves by signing the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, ~~C~~ 1862 but it didn't take effect until January 1, 1863.
 A. Lincoln the
 B. President freed
 C. 1862, but it
 D. No change is necessary.

Answer Key:
 1. B
 2. C
 3. B
 4. C
 5. C
 6. C
 7. D
 8. C
 9. A
 10. D
 11. B
 12. C
 13. D
 14. B
 15. C