

## Commas Made Easy!

The best piece of advice regarding comma usage is never use a comma without knowing, why you are using it. Use the eleven rules listed below to determine when and where a comma is required.

Rule #1 – Use a comma between the main parts of dates and addresses. Use commas to set off geographical names and professional titles.

- a. Geographical names: The speaker that day was from Vancouver, B.C.
- b. Items in dates: John A. MacDonald was born on January 10, 1815, in a log cabin near Glasglow, Scotland.
- c. Professional titles: Julia Bryant-Taneda, MA in Educational Leadership, will be the main speaker at the banquet.
- d. Addresses: Ralph and Stella lived at 123 Beach Street, Calgary, Alberta.

Rule #2 – Use commas to separate items in a series or list (greater than two items).

- a. Ralph had a pet salamander, a job at the pet store, and a wife named Stella.
- b. Stella liked to skateboard, rollerblade, and ride her new bike.

Rule #3 – Use commas to introduce direct quotations or to separate the “tags” (he said/she cried) from the quoted material. Remember, the comma always comes before the quotation mark.

- a. “Don’t go too fast,” Ralph warned Stella.
- b. Stella yelled, “Get that salamander out of my way!”

Rule #4 – Use commas to set off words of direct address.

- a. I am terribly sorry, Ralph, but your salamander bit me.
- b. Stella, how could you do this to me?

Rule #5 – Use commas to set off non-essential phrases/clauses. These add extra information to a sentence but are not necessary to its intended meaning.

- a. She sped from the shop, which was called “Lizards-R-Us”, with the little creature stuffed in her pocket.

b. Newspeak, which greatly reduced people's vocabularies, lessened their ability to understand scientific words.

Rule #6 – Use a comma to set off an absolute phrase.

a. Her mission accomplished, she headed for home.

b. His pet returned, Ralph dictated the pet rules.

Rule #7 – Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, nor, yet, for, so) that separates two independent clauses.

a. Provincial censorship boards flourished, but the pressure groups wanted a more comprehensive ban on objectionable material.

b. The student explained her question, yet the instructor still didn't seem to understand.

c. Yesterday Kitty ate an entire tin of tuna, and Kari was forced to run to the grocery store for more.

Rule #8 - Use a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or clause that comes before a main clause.

**\*\*Common starter words for introductory clauses that should be followed by a comma include after, although, as, because, if, since, when, while.**

a. Word: Strangely, no one has suggested that Watergate gave us a "new Nixon."

b. Phrase: Despite immigrant's high hopes, their illusions were often shattered

c. Clause: Since the new system was implemented, payroll has been processed 25% faster than it had been using the prior system.

Rule #9 - Use a comma to separate coordinate adjectives.

You could think of this as "That tall, distinguished, good looking fellow" rule (as opposed to "the little old lady"). If you can put an and or a but between the adjectives, a comma will probably belong there. For instance, you could say, "He is a tall and distinguished fellow" or "I live in a very old and run-down house." So you would write, "He is a tall, distinguished man" and "I live in a very old, run- down house." But you would probably not say, "She is a little and old lady,"

Rule #10 – Use a comma with an appositive.

An appositive is a noun or pronoun, often with modifiers, set beside another noun or pronoun to explain or identify it. Here are some examples of appositives:

Your friend **Bill** is in trouble.  
noun      appositive



My brother's car, **a sporty red convertible with bucket seats**, is the envy of my friends.  
noun      appositive



Rule #11 – Use commas around words or phrases that interrupt sentences.

The woman, however, was not fooled by the trick.

The water, dashing against the rocks, foamed and splashed.