

Basic Commas Rules in Writing

The word comma means "a piece cut off" in Greek.

Rule 1: Commas are used to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses in a series.

Example: Study for a test several days before, after school, and just before falling asleep at night.

Rule 2: Commas separate adjectives in a list modifying a noun (act as a replacement for "and" and "or").

Example: It was a dark, stormy night.

Rule 3: Commas are used after a group of words before the subject of a sentence that do not form a complete sentence (an introductory dependent clause).

Example: If you enjoy computer games, you will love the newest download.

Rule 4: Commas are used to set off introductory words and phrases including introductory adverbial, participial, and infinitive phrases as well as longer prepositional phrases.

Example: Hopefully, we will be on time for the appointment.
(word)

Not wanting to disturb him, she tiptoed to the dresser.
(phrase)

Rule 5: Commas are used between independent clauses (a group of words that makes a complete sentence) joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, or, nor, for, but, yet, so).

Example: The grass was too tall, so I mowed it.

Rule 6: Commas separate nonessential phrases and clauses from the rest of the sentence.

Example: The camera, I believe, has a warranty.

Rule 7: Commas set off an appositive (a word or phrase that renames a noun).

Example: Lisa, my cousin, works in a hospital.