



The Comma

USES

1. Use a comma when you join two independent clauses with a *coordinating conjunction* (FANBOYS: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so*).

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

2. Use a comma after a dependent clause that precedes an independent clause **EXAMPLE:** *If you are ill*, you ought to see a doctor.

3. Use a comma after a transitional word or phrase

EXAMPLE: However, you may not be satisfied with the results.

4. Use a comma after an introductory word or phrase

EXAMPLE: Looking excited and nervous, the defendant proceeded to the counter.

5. Use a pair of commas to mark the beginning and end of a *nonrestrictive phrase or clause* (gives incidental or descriptive information but isn't essential to the meaning of the sentence).

EXAMPLE: That Tuesday, *which happens to be my birthday*, is the only day when I am available to meet.

6. Use a comma to separate items in a series — including the last and next-to-last.

EXAMPLE: The Constitution establishes the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.

7. Use commas to separate two or more **coordinate adjectives** that describe the same noun. **EXAMPLE:** He was a difficult, stubborn defendant. (**coordinate adjectives**) ** If we substitute the *comma* with *and*, the sentence still makes sense.

EXAMPLE: She wore a gray wool shawl. (**non-coordinate adjectives**)

** If we *reverse the order* of the adjectives or add *and*, the sentence **doesn't** make sense.

8. Use a comma to distinguish indirect from direct speech.

EXAMPLE: The defendant said without emotion, "I am sorry to the victims."

9. Use commas to separate the parts of full dates and addresses.

EXAMPLE: The hearing is set for June 1, 2018 at 123 W. Litigant Way, Phoenix, Arizona.

COMMON MISUSES

1. **DON'T** use a comma between a subject and its verb.

- **INCORRECT:** Mary, rode her bike to school.

2. **DON'T** use a comma in the second part of a compound *predicate*.

- **INCORRECT:** Jones argued that Jefferson had exculpatory information, and charged the prosecutors with ignoring it.

3. **DON'T** put a comma between the two nouns, noun phrases, or noun clauses in a compound subject or compound object sentence.

- **INCORRECT (compound subject):** The music teacher from your high school, and the football coach from mine are married.