

Comma Usage: A Short Guide

1. Between items in a **series** of three or more

_____, _____, and _____ :

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| A. Words | We studied history, English, and speech. |
| B. Phrases | The cat jumped over the footstool, across the table, and onto the chair. |
| C. Clauses | Listening for a moment, joining in the mournful dirge, and floating out into the bleak, dark night, Marley's ghost left Scrooge. |

2. In **coordinate** situations:

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| A. Compound sentence with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, for, nor, so, yet) | Mark chose lasagna, and April chose eggplant parmesan. |
| B. Adjectives (only if they are reversible) | It was a dark, stormy night. |

3. After **introductory** elements in sentences

_____, sentence:

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| A. Transition word or phrase | In the beginning, the new dance step will feel odd. |
| B. Dependent clause | Although Mark Twain announced his candidacy, he did not have serious intentions of running for president. |
| C. Noun of address | Drew, the cake is done. |
| D. Mild interjections | Well, I could not believe my eyes. |
| E. Long prepositional phrases | In a hurry to get to class, he forgot his paper. |
| F. Participial phrases and words | Sliding out of control, the runner missed the base. |

4. To set off **interrupting** elements

Part of sentence, _____, end of sentence. :

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| A. Parenthetical expressions | He was, in fact, a bore. |
| B. Nouns of address | Grab the leash, Melissa, before the dog gets away. |
| C. Appositive (more specific repeaters or renamers) | The orderly pushed the patient, the one from the car accident on I-95, down the hall. |
| D. Contrasting elements (opposite repeaters) | I love listening to John Mayer and Nas, not Elton John. |

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| E. Phrases (unnecessary) | Jim finished his paper, working all night, and turned it in. |
| F. Dependent Clauses (unnecessary) | Writing a paper, even if one does not have to walk three miles in the snow to study English, is an involved task. |

5. In **standard** places:

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| A. Between parts of an address and after an address in a sentence | Use the address 459 Peachtree Lane, Atlanta, Georgia 25689, to ship the package. (Notice no comma appears between state and zip code.) He lived in Seattle, Washington, after graduating. |
| B. Between parts of a date and after a date in a sentence | He was born on April 1, 1885, in Portland. The semester ends in December 2007. (Notice no comma between a month or a season and a year.) |
| C. To set off a quote | Mark Twain observed, "The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them." "The job is too big," Craig said, "to be done today." |
| D. In a business letter after the close | Sincerely, |
| E. In a friendly letter after the opening and the close | Dear Amanda, Love, |
| F. Before and after titles in a sentence | Martin Luther King, Jr., worked tirelessly for equal rights. |
| G. To set off a question | You are going tonight, aren't you? |
| H. In numbers | 1,234 or 1234, but always 1,000,000 |

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