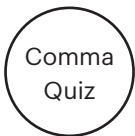


Comma Rules and Uses

Commas, the most frequently used punctuation marks, signal pauses within a sentence. While this sounds like a variable and subjective quality of written language, these pauses are strategically placed to help readers understand. When writers place commas based on their vocal patterns alone, the meaning may not transfer correctly. In fact, commas don't automatically occur just because a sentence is long, like this example:

No one in Barack Obama's high school class at the Punahou School in Hawaii could have guessed that one day he would be elected the 44th president of the United States.

Following the rules that govern commas in our writing is crucial to effective communication. Below, you'll find a list of those rules in the left column with examples of each usage on the right.



Can you add the commas in the right place? *You'll find the solution at the end of this handout.*

Anne West who has taught at RISD for over a decade though not an architect herself learned through her work with graduate students much about the process and principles central to architecture and enjoys working with the subject matter.

<p>Commas DO separate parts of a compound sentence (just before the coordinating conjunction, of which there are only 7: <i>for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so</i> — easily memorized as “fanboys”).</p>	<p>The movie was sold out, so we decided to go to a play instead.</p> <p>The play was a hit, but we arrived early enough to get seats.</p>
<p>Commas DON'T separate the parts of a compound predicate in which two verbs have the same subject.</p>	<p>Our friends are easy-going and don't get upset when plans change.</p>
<p>Commas DON'T separate a subject and a verb even if there's an adjective clause between them.</p>	<p>The large box at the top of the stairs belongs to Jack.</p> <p><i>NOT: The large box at the top of the stairs, belongs to Jack.</i></p>
<p>Commas DO stop an introductory word or phrase from running into a subject.</p>	<p>Yes, I will be coming to Alex's graduation party. However, I won't be able to bring a pasta salad. Confused by the assignment, the student asked for clarification.</p>
<p>Commas DON'T stop an introductory phrase from running into a verb.</p>	<p>Up the hill, Jack ran.</p>

<p>Commas DO come after an introductory subordinate clause.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — contains its own subject + predicate — is not a full sentence or complete thought without the main clause — begins with a subordinating conjunction (although, because, if, when, after...) 	<p>Because the lesson was confusing, Mrs. Smith gave more notes.</p> <p>If I get the scholarship, I will be thrilled.</p> <p>Although I applied to several other art schools, I really wanted to go to RISD.</p>
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<p>Commas DON'T separate a subordinate clause in the middle or at the end of a sentence.</p>	<p>Mrs. Smith gave more notes because the lesson was confusing.</p> <p>I will be thrilled if I get the scholarship.</p> <p>I really wanted to go to RISD although I applied to several other art schools.</p>
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<p>Commas DO set off words in apposition (giving additional information about the preceding or following word or expression).</p>	<p>An American, Mary Cassatt lived and painted in Paris.</p> <p>Mary Cassatt, an American, lived and painted in Paris.</p>
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<p>Commas DON'T set off restrictive clauses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — A restrictive clause gives essential information about the noun it describes, making it necessary to the sentence. — Restrictive clauses begin with a relative pronoun such as that, which, who, whom, or whose. 	<p>Commas that are used correctly make text easier to read.</p> <p>My brother who lives in Colorado is an architect. (I have more than one brother; this restrictive clause identifies which brother.)</p>
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<p>Commas DO set off non-restrictive clauses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — begins with a relative pronoun — adds extra meaning, but can be removed 	<p>Commas, which can be tricky to use correctly, make text easier to read.</p> <p>My sister, who lives in Vermont, is a sculptor. (I have only one sister.)</p>
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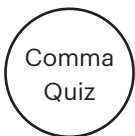
<p>Commas DO set off insertions/interjections.</p>	<p>The truth, however, finally came out.</p>
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We also need commas to...

<p>Separate items in a series of 3 or more: Current conventional usage allows the final ("serial") comma before the "and" to be omitted. We recommend it, however, to avoid confusion. (In the second example, if that final comma were removed, you might think da Vinci and Rembrandt are the modernists.):</p>	<p>In the class sat a bearded man, a police officer, a woman eating a sandwich, and a toy poodle.</p> <p>In Art History class today, we learned about the modernists, da Vinci, and Rembrandt.</p>
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<p>Set off dialogue:</p>	<p>Martha said, "This movie won an academy award." "This movie," Martha said, "won an Academy Award." "This movie won an academy award," Martha said.</p>
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Separate the parts of an address:	Rick lives at 163 East Plains Drive, Boston, MA 89012.
Set off words of direct address:	Nancy, please clean your room. Please clean your room, Nancy. Ms. Barbara Gilson, Editorial Director
Separate names and titles:	Laurie Rozakis, Ph.D.
Separate the day of the month and the year in a date: but not where only the month and year are given:	Barack Obama was born on Friday, August 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii. Barack Obama was born in August 1961.
Show amounts in numeral form:	5,000 50,000 500,000 5,000,000
And after letter greetings and closings:	Dear Mom, Dear Jin, Yours Truly, Sincerely,



Comma Quiz Solution:

Anne West, who has taught at RISD for over a decade, though not an architect herself, learned, through her work with graduate students, much about the process and principles central to architecture and enjoys working with the subject matter.