

Punctuation

Commas²

Commas are sometimes troublesome to learners of English because they are used differently in other languages. There are many comma rules in English, but you may remember them more easily if you realize that they can be organized into just four main groups: **introducers, coordinators, inserters, and tags**. Each group of commas relates to independent clauses in a particular way, except the coordinator group. Coordinator commas link not just independent clauses, but *any* coordinate (equal) elements in a sentence.

Study the examples for each comma group, and notice the kinds of elements that can be introducers, coordinators, inserters, and tags.

INTRODUCER COMMAS	An introducer comma follows any element that comes in front of the first independent clause in a sentence. _____, INDEPENDENT CLAUSE .
Words	Therefore , I plan to quit smoking. Nervously , I threw away my cigarettes.
Phrases	As a result , I feel terrible right now. After sixteen years of smoking , it is not easy to quit. Having smoked for sixteen years , I find it difficult to quit.
Dependent clauses	Because I have a chronic cough , my doctor recommended that I quit immediately.
Direct quotations	"Stop smoking today," she advised.

COORDINATOR COMMAS	Together with a coordinating conjunction, a comma links coordinate (equal) elements in a sentence.
Compound sentence with 2 independent clauses	coord. INDEPENDENT CLAUSE , conj. INDEPENDENT CLAUSE . She has a good job , yet she is always broke . They were tired , so they went home early .
Series of 3 or more items:	_____, _____, _____, and _____, or _____, but _____.
Words	He doesn't enjoy skiing, ice-skating, or sledding . Cecile speaks English, Spanish, French, and Creole . (No comma with only 2 items: Chen speaks Mandarin and Taiwanese.)
Phrases	A nurse has to work at night, on weekends, and on holidays . We ran into the airport, checked our luggage, raced to the boarding gate, gave the attendant our boarding passes, and collapsed in our seats.

Oshima, P. & Hogue, A. 1991
Writing Academic English
3rd Ed., Longman, N.Y.

INSERTER COMMAS	An inserter comma is used before and after any element that is inserted into the middle of an independent clause. <div>INDEPENDENT</div> , _____ , <div>CLAUSE</div> .
Words	My uncle, however , refuses to quit smoking.
Phrases	My father, on the other hand , has never smoked. There's no point in living, according to my uncle , if you don't do what you enjoy.
Nonrestrictive phrases and clauses	My aunt, his wife , died of lung cancer. My cousins, grieving over their mother's death , resolved never to smoke. My mother, who just celebrated her fiftieth birthday , enjoys an occasional cigarette.
Reporting verbs in direct quotations	"I've tried to quit dozens of times," she says , "but can't."

TAG COMMAS	A tag comma is used when adding certain elements to the end of a sentence. <div>INDEPENDENT CLAUSE</div> , _____ .
Words	My uncle believes in drinking a daily glass of wine, too . He appears to be in good health, however .
Phrases	He swims for an hour every day, for example . He also plays tennis, beating me most of the time
Tag questions	It isn't logical, is it?
Direct quotations	He laughs as he says, " I will outlive all of you ."

PRACTICE 1

Using Commas

- STEP 1** Add commas wherever they are necessary. (Not all sentences need them, and some sentences need more than one.)
- STEP 2** Name the function of each comma (introducer, coordinator, inserter, or tag).

Function

- _____ 1. The advertising industry which is one of the largest industries in the United States employs millions of people and spends billions of dollars.
- _____ 2. A company that wants to be successful must spend a great deal of money to advertise its products.
- _____ 3. Advertising is essential to the free enterprise system yet it can sometimes be very annoying.
- _____ 4. Every minute of the day and night people are exposed to ads on television on billboards in the newspapers and in magazines.

Before Connectors

Use a semicolon before conjunctive adverbs such as *however*, *therefore*, *nevertheless*, *moreover*, and *furthermore*. You may also use a semicolon before some transition phrases such as *for example*, *as a result*, *that is*, *in fact*, etc.

conjunctive adverb or Independent clause ; transition , independent clause. phrase	
Skiing is dangerous; nevertheless, millions of people ski. I have never been to Europe; in fact, I have never been outside my country.	

Between Items in a Series

Semicolons may be used to separate items in a series when some of the items already contain commas.

I cannot decide which car I like best: the Ferrari, with its quick acceleration and sporty look; the midsize Ford Taurus, with its comfortable seats and ease of handling; or the compact Geo, with its economical fuel consumption.

Colons

A **colon** (:) can be used in five ways:

Lists

Use a colon to introduce a list.

Libraries have two kinds of periodicals: bound periodicals and current periodicals.

I need the following groceries: eggs, milk, and coffee.

The causes of the U.S. Civil War were as follows: the economic domination of the North, the slavery issue, and the issue of states' rights versus federal intervention.

Note: Do not use a colon to introduce a list after the verb *to be* unless you add *the following* or *as follows*.

To me, the most important things in life **are** health, happiness, good friends, and a lot of money.

To me, the most important things in life **are the following:** health, happiness, good friends, and a lot of money.

Long Quotations

Use a colon to introduce a quotation longer than three lines. This type of quote is indented on both sides, and no quotation marks are used.

As Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable state in their book, *The History of the English Language*:

There is no such thing as uniformity in language. Not only does the speech of one community differ from that of another; but the speech of different individuals of a single community, even different members of the same family, is marked by individual peculiarities.³

- _____ 5. You can't even avoid advertising in the privacy of your own car or your own home for advertisers have begun selling their products in those places too.
- _____ 6. In the last few years advertising agencies have started to hire young people to hand out circulars on street corners and in parking lots.
- _____ 7. You can often find these circulars stuck on your windshield thrust¹ through the open windows of your car stuffed in your mailbox or simply scattered on your front doorstep.
- _____ 8. Because Americans are exposed to so much advertising they have become immune² to it.
- _____ 9. As a result advertisers have to make louder commercials use brighter colors and hire sexier models to catch the public's attention.
- _____ 10. Many people object to commercials that use sex as a sales strategy.
- _____ 11. Sexy commercials that sell everything from toothpaste to automobiles seem to imply that you will become sexier if you buy the product.
- _____ 12. Sex is used in many cigarette and liquor ads for example.
- _____ 13. The women in such ads are often dressed in revealing clothes and are surrounded by handsome men and the men in such ads are always extremely handsome and virile.
- _____ 14. As everyone knows smoking and drinking do not make you sexy or virile.
- _____ 15. On the contrary drinking makes you fat and smoking makes you sick.
- _____ 16. Recently smoking was banned in most public places in the United States.
- _____ 17. Many people opposed the law but it finally passed.
- _____ 18. Smoking is now prohibited in hospitals airports stores offices and even some restaurants.
- _____ 19. Many states however still allow smoking in bars.
- _____ 20. Anti-smoking groups want to ban smoking in those places too.

Semicolons

Using **semicolons** is not difficult if you remember that a semicolon (;) is more like a period than a comma. It is a very strong punctuation mark. Semicolons are used in three places:

1. Between two sentences that are closely connected in idea
2. Before conjunctive adverbs and some transitional phrases
3. Between items in a series if the items themselves contain commas

Between Sentences

Use a semicolon at the end of a sentence when the following sentence is closely connected in meaning. You could also use a period, but when the sentences are connected in meaning, it is better to use a semicolon.

Independent clause ; independent clause.

Alice is going to Harvard; she isn't going to M.I.T.

Computer use is increasing; computer crime is, too.

The meeting adjourned¹ at dawn; nothing had been accomplished.