

Writing Center	<h1>7 Comma Rules</h1>
<b>TIPS</b>	

[from the University of Delaware Writing Center at [http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/handouts/rules\\_for\\_commas.html](http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/handouts/rules_for_commas.html)]

**1. Put a comma before and, but, for, or, nor, yet, so when they connect two independent clauses.**

*We lost our oars, and that was the end of our boating.*

*We leave Friday, or we may wait until Monday.*

*I wanted to go but could not get my car started.*

The last example does not have two independent clauses; therefore, no comma is needed.

**2. Put a comma between items in a series.**

*Hurrah for the red, white, and blue.*

*She put down the phone, picked up her purse, and left.*

But: no comma is needed for *The eager little boy*

The way to tell whether a comma is needed between two words in a series is to see whether the word "and" could be used naturally between them. Simply use a comma where the word "and" could be used.

\*\*\* If an address or date is used in a sentence, treat it as a series, putting a comma after every item, including the last: *He was born on May 17, 1959, in Salisbury, North Carolina, and grew up there. She lived at 2340 Tenth Avenue, Doylestown, Pennsylvania, for two years.*

**3. Put a comma after an introductory expression that does not flow smoothly into a sentence.**

*Yes, I'll go.*

*Well, that was the end of that.*

*Rushing down the hill, she slipped and fell.*

*When everyone had left, the auditorium was locked for the night.*

A dependent clause at the beginning of a sentence usually needs a comma after it. In the last example, you can see that a comma is necessary. Otherwise, the reader would read "When everyone had left the auditorium..." before realizing that that was not what the writer meant. A comma makes the reading easier.

**4. Put commas around the name of a person spoken to.**

*I think, Bianca, you are absolutely right.*

*Craig, how about a game of tennis?*

**5. Put commas around an expression that interrupts the flow of the sentence**

(for example: however, moreover, finally, therefore, of course, by the way,)

*He thought, however, that I should wait.*

*It should, I think, take only an hour.*

But I think, I am sure, and similar expressions are not interrupters if they occur at the beginning of the sentence, so they don't require commas.

*I think it should only take an hour.*

However, therefore, on the other hand, etc., *still* require commas if they begin the sentence, and if they come between two independent clauses require a semicolon in front of them and a comma after.

*He was busy; however, he took time to help.*

**6. Put commas around nonessential material.**

The material may be interesting, but the main idea of the sentence would be clear without it.

*Gladys Nolan, who is heading the United Fund drive, broke her ankle.*

The clause "who is heading the United Fund drive" is not essential to the main idea of the sentence. Without it we still know exactly who the sentence is about and exactly what she did: Gladys Nolan broke her ankle.

But in the following sentence:

*The woman who is heading the United Fund drive broke her ankle.*

The clause "who is heading the United Fund drive" is essential to the main idea of the sentence. Therefore, commas are not used around it.

**7. Use commas to set off expressions such as he said or she asked from direct quotations.**

*He said, "Our team will win the championship."*

*"Our team," the coach asserted, "will win the championship."*

*"Our team will win the championship," John stated.*