NEW PAGE

**Commas**

Commas probably show up on the test more frequently than any other grammar topic. Luckily, all of the commas used on the test boil down to three basic uses. We'll see commas used to separate items in lists, to mark off dependent clauses, and to connect independent clauses.

**Lists**

We use commas between each of the items in a list:

**I had to buy apples, bananas, and cucumbers.**

The test defaults to the Oxford comma, the one right before the *and.* It’s a good idea to do the same on the essay section, just to be safe.

NEW PAGE

**Multiple Choice**

I did my laundry made my bed and performed my nightly breathing exercises.

A) NO CHANGE

B) I did, my laundry, made, my bed, and performed, my nightly breathing exercises.

C) I did my laundry, made my bed, and performed my nightly breathing exercises.

D) I did, my laundry, made my bed, and performed my nightly breathing exercises.

NEW PAGE

**Dependent Clauses**

We use commas to separate dependent clauses from the independent clauses they modify.

An **independent clause** has a subject, a verb, and a fully fleshed out thought. It's independent because it can stand alone as its own sentence.

A **dependent clause**, on the other hand, is a word or phrase which doesn’t amount to a full sentence. It can't stand on its own; therefore, it is dependent on another clause.

Basically, we can add a dependent clause to an independent one if we put commas around the dependent clause. The dependent clause can go at the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence.

NEW PAGE

**Introductions**

Dependent clauses at the beginning of sentences serve as introductions. They typically provide us with some kind of setting for the rest of the sentence.

These introductory clauses can stretch from one word all the way to long, mellifluous phrases.

*First, I drove to the store.*

*As rain lashed against my windows and wind tore the trees out of the ground, I drove to the store.*

NEW PAGE

**First, I drove to the store.**

In this sentence, **First** is our dependent clause. It gives us the context for the rest of the sentence.

**I drove to the store** is our independent clause. It could stand alone as a full sentence.

We separate the dependent clause from the independent one with a comma. We should be able to take everything before the comma (**First**) out and still enough for a sentence (**I drove to the store**).

NEW PAGE

**As rain lashed against my windows and wind tore the trees out of the ground, I drove to the store.**

**As rain lashed against my windows and wind tore the trees out of the ground** is our dependent clause here.

Even though it's a much longer descriptive phrase than **First**, this string of words still doesn't have enough to stand on its own as a sentence.

**I drove to the store**is our independent clause again.

We use a comma to mark the end of the dependent clause and the beginning of the independent clause. If we were to take out the dependent clause, we’d still be left with a perfectly fine sentence.

NEW PAGE

**Interruptions**

We can move the dependent clause to the middle of the sentence, interrupting the independent clause with important details. We put commas at the beginning and at the end of the dependent clause to set it apart from the independent one.

*Michael Jordan, therefore, is widely regarded as the greatest basketball player of all time.*

*Michael Jordan, who played his college basketball at the University of North Carolina, is widely regarded as the greatest basketball player of all time.*

NEW PAGE

**Michael Jordan, therefore, is widely regarded as the greatest basketball player of all time.**

In this sentence, **therefore** serves as our interrupting dependent clause. It ties our present sentence back to the previous one (which presumably detailed Jordan's many accomplishments).

**Michael Jordan is widely regarded as the greatest basketball player of all time** is the (interrupted) independent clause.

We put commas before and after**therefore***.* We should be able to momentarily lift the material in between the commas out and still have enough material for a full sentence (**Michael Jordan is widely regarded as the greatest basketball player of all time**).

NEW PAGE

**Michael Jordan, who played his college basketball at the University of North Carolina, is widely regarded as the greatest basketball player of all time.**

Here, the dependent clause is **who played his college basketball at the University of North Carolina**. It provides an important descriptive detail.

**Michael Jordan is widely regarded as the greatest basketball player of all time** is our independent clause again.

We put commas around **who played his college basketball at the University of North Carolina** to mark it off from the rest of the sentence. If we took the words between the commas out, we'd still have a full independent clause.

NEW PAGE

**Conclusions**

We can also add dependent clauses at the end of sentences, concluding the sentence with a new piece of information.

*Virginia Woolf wrote several beloved works of fiction and nonfiction, even though women faced countless obstacles to writing and publishing books during her lifetime.*

NEW PAGE

**Virginia Woolf wrote several beloved works of fiction and nonfiction, even though women faced countless obstacles to writing and publishing books during her lifetime.**

Here, ourdependentclause is **even though women faced countless obstacles to writing and publishing books during her lifetime***.* This detail complicates the information that came before it.

Our independent clause is **Virginia Woolf wrote several beloved works of fiction and nonfiction**, which could stand as its own sentence.

We put a comma before the dependent clause. If we lift the string of words after the comma out, we still have a functional sentence.

NEW PAGE

Where should we put the comma(s) in these sentences?

Although I didn't know how to get there, I was too proud to ask for directions.

I kept driving straight, even though I suspected that I was just going further and further away from my destination.

My car, which has a leaky gas tank, ran out of fuel.

Next, my engine, which has been defective for years, exploded.

NEW PAGE

**Independent Clauses**

Finally, we can use a comma and a coordinating conjunction to connect two fully independent clauses.

The coordinating conjunctions are listed in the acronym FANBOYS:

**F**or

**A**nd

**N**or

**B**ut

**O**r

**Y**et

**S**o

We can use a comma plus an appropriate FANBOYS to connect two ideas.

*I tore myself away from the dinner table, for I had already consumed more calories than an Olympic swimmer.*

*We shared a pizza, and I ate a meatball sandwich, a bag of chips, and an entire order of buffalo wings on my own.*

NEW PAGE

**I tore myself away from the dinner table, for I had already consumed more calories than an Olympic swimmer.**

**I tore myself away from the dinner table**is our first independent clause: it could stand alone as its own sentence.

We use a comma to mark the send of this first clause. Then, we add **for**to connect the two ideas. **For** indicates cause-and-effect. We always want to make sure that the FANBOYS we’re using to connect the clauses itself makes sense. We want to make sure it’s indicating the right connection.

**I had already consumed more calories than an Olympic swimmer**is our second independent clause. We always want to make sure that we have full independent clauses on both sides of the FANBOYS.

NEW PAGE

**We shared a pizza, and I ate a meatball sandwich, a bag of chips, and an entire order of buffalo wings on my own.**

**We shared a pizza**can stand as its own independent clause.

We mark the end of that phrase with a comma, then add **and** to connect the two ideas. **And** makes a lot of sense here: we’re just adding the two ideas (what they shared plus what the speaker ate alone) together.

**I ate a meatball sandwich, a bag of chips, and an entire order of buffalo wings on my own**is also a perfectly fine independent clause, though it’s a terrible dietary plan.

NEW PAGE

There are a few common mistakes to watch out for.

*I knew all of the answers on the test, I was sure to get an A.*

This sentence is incorrect because it just smushes two independent clauses together with no FANBOYS. We can never connect two independent clauses together with just a comma.

We could fix this sentence by adding a FANBOYS.

*I knew all of the answers on the test, therefore, I was sure to get an A.*

This is a **comma splice**.

Here we have our two clauses connected by a transitional expression. *Therefore* serves as an interrupting dependent clause— that's why we put commas around it. That means we should be able to take *therefore* out of the sentence and still have one intact independent clause around it.

However, if we take *therefore* out of this sentence, it becomes *I knew all of the answers on the test I was sure to get an A.* That sentence has way too much going on.

NEW PAGE

**Does this work?**

I wanted to go to the beach, but couldn’t because of the rain*.*

I knew I had aced the test, so I took the rest of the day off and watched random youtube videos.

I wanted to play some basketball, so my ball was flat.

NEW PAGE

**Review**

Comma questions on the test will task us with correctly placing commas in lists, around dependent clauses, and in between independent clauses.

**Lists**

We use commas to separate items in a list.

In order to make dinner tonight, I need **pasta, diced tomatoes, cream, and bread.**

**Dependent clauses**

We can also use commas to set a dependent clause apart from the beginning, middle, or end of an independent clause.

**First**, I left to go to the grocery store.

I realized, **however**, that I’d locked my keys inside my house.

I had to break in through the window, **even though it’s my own house**.

**Independent Clauses**

Finally, we can use a comma and an appropriate FANBOYS to connect two independent clauses that are related to each other.

A policeman saw me trying to smash my window**, and** he immediately arrested me.