Punctuation – Commas

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Commas are used to join elements of a sentence.

When reading, we insert a short pause for the comma.

There are differences between UK and US rules.

These can be introductory parts, clauses, or list items.

They separate quoted and unquoted text.

Commas can be used as a separator for large numbers.

They separate non-essential clauses from the main sentence.

They are used in tag questions.

Commas separate a direct address from the rest of the sentence.

Commas are also used to write dates more clearly.

Please note that the spelling is 'comma' – a 'coma' is something else!

Commas – Examples #1

There are differences between UK and US rules.

In the UK, there is no comma before the 'and' or 'or' at the end of a list.

In the US, there is a comma there.

For further information, please refer to the section on the Oxford comma.

➢UK: The fruit bowl contained apples, bananas and pears.

➢US: The fruit bowl contained apples, bananas, and pears.

Commas – Examples #2

Commas are used to join elements of a sentence.

These can be:

➢introductory parts

➢clauses

➢a list of items

Commas – Examples #3

Commas are used after an introductory phrase or word.

The introductory word or phrase acts as a sort of 'scene setter'.

➢Trembling with fear, the children opened the cellar door.

➢One fine afternoon, they set off for a picnic.

➢Undeterred, they left work early.

➢Suddenly, it started to snow.

Commas – Examples #4

Commas are used to join clauses of a sentence.

➢We had dinner, did the dishes and went out dancing.

➢Next year I want to take my driving test, start a new job and get married.

➢Today I washed the dishes, cleaned the house and got dinner ready.

Commas – Examples #5

Commas are used to join list items.

The items can be verbs, adverbs, nouns or adjectives.

➢The acrobat jumped, twisted, turned and tumbled.

➢Go there quietly, quickly and directly.

➢This recipe requires chicken, rice, peppers and cream.

➢I'll have a pint of delicious, cool, tasty, dark beer.

Commas – Examples #6

Commas separate quoted and unquoted text.

Please see the lesson on quotation marks for more information.

➢My doctor told me, "I have good news for you."

➢"I have good news for you", my doctor told me.

➢"I have", my doctor told me, "good news for you."

Commas – Examples #7

Commas can be used as a separator for large numbers.

This can be tricky, as this is the opposite of some languages!

In English, we use the comma (or space) to separate thousands etc.

➢1,234

➢6,378,134

➢3,456,238,235,789,346,235

Commas – Examples #8

Commas separate non-restrictive clauses from the main sentence.

The information between the commas is additional information.

The sentence still makes sense if it is omitted.

➢My friend, John, plays drums in a band.

➢My brother, who lives in Rome, has two children.

➢My brother who lives in Rome has two children.

Commas – Examples #9

Commas can separate dependent and independent clauses.

If the sentence starts with the independent clause, no comma is needed.

➢Since you're all here, we might as well start.

➢We might as well start since you're all here.

➢When Bob gets here, we will make a move.

➢We will make a move when Bob gets here.

Commas – Examples #10

Commas are used in tag questions.

They separate the statement part from the tag part.

➢This is a tag question, isn't it?

➢You'll be home on time, won't you?

➢He hasn't booked his holiday yet, has he?

➢Dreadful weather today, isn't it?

Commas – Examples #11

Commas separate a direct address from the rest of the sentence.

➢Paul, get out of bed!

➢Are you, Paul, ever going to get up?

➢How are you feeling today, Suzi?

Commas – Examples #12

Commas are used to write dates more clearly.

There are many different date formats and all have their place.

You need a comma to separate numbers or words that are next to each other, but not consecutive numbers and words.

➢On March 14, 1879, Albert Einstein was born.

➢Albert Einstein was born on March 14, 1879.

➢The party was on Monday, January 7, 2019.

➢The party was on 7 January 2019.