

# CORE COMMA RULES

(Brought to you by [The Writing Teacher](#))

## Pre-work:

### 1. Why do you use a comma?

#### When in doubt, leave it out:

If you don't know the reason why you are putting in a comma, don't use one.

### 2. What is a sentence?

### 3. Conjunctions are comma signals:

- **Coordinating conjunctions** connect equal parts: *and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*
- **Subordinating conjunctions** show relationships: *after, before, although, while, if, and so on.*
- **Adverbial conjunctions** build bridges: *however, therefore, for example, in conclusion, and so on.*

## For practice exercises:

1. Identify the verb first and then work backward in the sentence to identify the grammatical subject.
  2. When the grammatical subject is not easily identified, consider if “you understood” or “I understood” is the subject.
  3. Verbs in their infinitive form (*to* plus the base form, such as *to see, to be, to go*) do not function as the verb in the sentence.
  4. And by the way, “A sentence has a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought.”
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**Rule 1: The Sentence Core Rules.** Do not separate a subject and verb with only one comma.

**Rule 2: Conjunction (CONJ).** Put a comma before a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or*) when it connects two independent clauses.

*Sidney would like to go to the meeting, but she has a conflict.*

**Rule 3: Series (SER).** Use a comma to separate three or more items in a series.

*Please bring potatoes, peas, and carrots to the potluck dinner.  
The estate was left to Bob, Rose, Charlie, and Sophie.*

**Rule 4: Introductory (INTRO).** Place a comma after a word (an adverbial conjunction), a phrase, or a dependent clause that introduces a main clause.

*Furthermore, they accepted our proposal.  
As a result, Luigi offered to help our committee.  
When the meeting ended, you began working on the project.*

**Rule 5: Nonrestrictive (NR).** Use commas to set off words and phrases nonessential to the meaning of the sentence.

Alice Walker, *who is a prestigious author*, will be the keynote speaker.  
The woman *who is a prestigious author* will be the keynote speaker.

**Rule 6: Parenthetical (PAR).** Use commas to set off a word or phrase that interrupts an independent clause.

Our team will, however, need more time to complete the report.

**Rule 7: Direct Address (DA).** Use commas to set off the name or title of a person addressed directly.

Our company, Ms. Nagel, appreciates your business.  
Bob, our mission supports your cause.  
Please, sir, take a seat in front.

**Rule 8: Appositive (AP).** Use commas to set off words or phrases that describe or identify a preceding noun or pronoun.

Charles, my brother, will join us at 8 o'clock.  
The president, Mr. McCartan, prefers that meetings begin on time.

**Rule 9: Addresses and Dates (AD).** Use commas to set off addresses and dates.

Matteo listed January 5, 2000, as his start date.  
Juliana has lived in Boston, Massachusetts, for the past six years.

**Rule 10: (WO).** Use a comma to indicate a word is omitted.

The problem is, the current situation is unacceptable.  
The large, enthusiastic crowd welcomed the speaker.

**Rule 11: Direct Quotation (DQ)** Use commas to set off direct quotations within a sentence.

Gabrielle said, "I have a 9 o'clock meeting," and then she left abruptly.

**Rule 12: Contrasting Expression or Afterthought (CEA).** Use a comma to separate a contrasting expression or afterthought.

I asked for the report, not the agenda.

**Note: When you work on the practice exercise, work with a partner and have *fun!***