

Core Comma Rules

**Core Lessons for Motivating Students
to Write Effectively**

by Dona Young

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Core Comma Rules

- In total, there are 12 core rules.
- The starting point is asking students why they place a comma and then letting them know that there is ***no pause rule***:

When in doubt, leave the comma out.



In other words, from this point on . . .

If students don't know the reason they are putting in a comma, they should *not* use a comma.

- **Before learning the rules, it is a good idea to review conjunctions.**



Conjunctions are comma signals.

■ Coordinating Conjunctions

and but or for nor so yet

■ Subordinating Conjunctions

before after because while if
although

■ Adverbial Conjunctions

however therefore for example in fact



Conjunctions affect writing style.

Conjunctions . . .

- Pull your reader's thinking along with your message.
- Provide transitions and bridge ideas.
- Bring flow to choppy writing.



Let's get to work and learn some comma rules!

- For practice exercises, identify the verb first and work backward to identify the grammatical subject.
- Underline the verb twice and the subject once.
- As you analyze each sentence, identify the reason for comma use.



Rule 1. The Sentence Core Rules

Never separate a subject and verb with just one comma.

Incorrect: **Marty and Jane, will meet me at the football game.**

Correct: **Marty and Jane will meet me . . .**



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.

What is an independent clause?



Rule 3. SERIES (SER)

Use commas to separate three or more items in a series.

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



Rule 4. INTRODUCTORY (INTRO)

Place a comma after a word, phrase, or dependent clause that introduces a main clause.

- A. *Furthermore*, they accepted our proposal.
- B. *After the meeting*, Luigi offered to help our committee.
- C. *When the meeting ended*, you began working on the project.



Identifying Dependent Clauses

*What is a **dependent clause**?*

Which **word** in the dependent clause keeps it from being an independent clause?

When your client arrived . . .



Rule 5. NONRESTRICTIVE (NR)

Use commas to set off explanations that are nonessential to the meaning of the sentence.

- A. Alice Walker, *who is a prestigious author*, will be the keynote speaker.
- B. 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.

Note: A parenthetical expression comes in the form of an **adverbial conjunction** such as *however* or *therefore* or a short phrase such as *in my opinion*.



7. DIRECT ADDRESS (DA)

Use commas to set off the name or title of a person addressed directly.

- A. Our company, *Ms. Nascenzi*, appreciates your business.
- B. *Bob*, our mission supports your cause.
- C. Please, *sir*, accept my apology.



Understood (or Implied) Subjects

Please, sir, take a handout for the presentation.

Who? (you)

Thank you, Tracie, for your help.

Who? (I)



Rule 8. APPOSITIVE (AP)

Use commas to set off words or phrases that describe or identify a preceding noun or pronoun.

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



Rule 9. ADDRESSES and DATES (AD)

Use commas to set off addresses and dates.

- A. Matteo listed January 5, 2002, as his start date.**
- B. Juliana has lived in Boston, Massachusetts, for the past six years.**
- C. Chicago, Illinois, is a great city for a conference.**



Rule 10. Words Omitted (WO)

Use a comma to indicate a word is omitted.

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

Note: The word “that” is part of the structure and is implied even when it is removed. Most of the time, removing “that” does not create an awkward sen



Rule 11. Direct Quotation (DQ)

Use commas to set off a direct quotation within a sentence.

Gabrielle said, “I have a 9 o’clock meeting,” and then she left abruptly.

Note: Closed punctuation style is the official standard in the U.S., and commas *always* go inside quotation marks.



Rule 12. Contrasting Expression or Afterthought (CEA)

Use a comma to separate a contrasting expression or afterthought.

I asked for the information so that I could process the sale, *not to lose it.*

My cousin Buddy drove me to the airport, *not my brother Chuck.*



Practice makes progress!

**Now let's roll up our sleeves and
have some fun!**



For more information . . .

Contact *The Writer's Toolkit*:
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The Mechanics of Writing

Which Comes First, the Comma or the Pause?
A Practical Guide to Writing

and

***Writing from the Core: Integrating
Structure with Style***
(available Summer 2009)

