

COMMA SAMPLER

1. Serial commas divide items in lists. They are inserted before the “and” that precedes the last item on the list when more than two items are listed. (The sense is that the comma is correct if it can be replaced by the word **and** or **or**.)

Ex: John was singing, Jean was playing the guitar, and Alan was running errands and furnishing food.

Ex: . . . Alan was running errands and furnishing food. (No comma needed because there are only two items listed.)

- 1a. In a list of adjectives, use a comma where an **and** could replace the comma and where the modifying words are all modifying the same thing to the same degree.

*Ex: It was a dark, stormy night. (The night was dark **and** stormy.)*

- 1b. Two or more adjectives that could be reversed and still make sense require a comma. They are called coordinate adjectives.

Ex: She has a young, good-looking friend.

- 1c. Two or more adjectives that would not make sense if they were reversed do not require a comma.

Ex: She has many young friends.

2. Commas for joining are used when two complete sentences are joined together, using such conjunctions as *but, while, yet, however, nevertheless, etc.*

Ex: The boys wanted to stay up until midnight, but they grew tired and fell asleep.

Ex: Jim went to sleep in a strange bed, nevertheless, he slept soundly through the night.

Ex: That was indeed the outcome of the study. (No comma because no pause is intended or desired.)

3. Commas fill in gaps that are implied by the sentence.

Ex: Annie had dark hair; Sally, blonde.

4. Commas appear before direct speech.

Ex: The bishop asked, “Where is my miter?”

Ex: “Where is my miter?” the bishop asked. (Comma not used)

5. Commas are used when a word, abbreviation, phrase, or clause that provides an explanatory equivalent to what precedes is used **and** can be omitted without obscuring the identity of the noun to which it refers. This word, abbreviation, phrase, or clause is called an appositive.

Ex: Dr. Timoney's husband, John, is also a musician.

- 5a. Commas are not used with an appositive that provides essential information about the noun to which it refers.

Ex: The renowned scholar and author Raymond Studzinski scheduled a six-city tour for September.

6. A dependent clause that precedes a main clause should be followed by a comma.

Ex: If you accept our conditions, we shall agree to the proposal.

- 6a. A dependent clause that follows a main clause does not use a comma.

Ex: We shall agree to the proposal if you accept our conditions.

7. Introductory participial or adverbial phrases use a comma at the conclusion of the phrase.

Ex: Failing in their quest, the team resolved to train harder in the off-season. (Participial)

Ex: On the other hand, his insights outweighed his eccentricities. (Adverbial)

8. In month-day-year style of dates, commas must be used to set off the year but no comma is used if using the day-month-year style of dates. No comma is used in the month-year style of dates.

Ex: The oral presentation took place on June 8, 2018, in the Happel Room.

Ex: The watchman concluded his rounds at 4:00 a.m. on 6 October 2018 and went home.

Ex: In March 2018 she turned seventy-five.

9. Commas with quotations are generally used unless preceded by *that*, *whether*, or a similar conjunction.

Ex: She replied, "I hope you are not referring to us."

Ex: It was Stevenson who said that "the cruelest of lies are often told in silence."

Bibliography

Truss, Lynne. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. New York: Avery, 2003.

University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff. *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th edition, 6:16-55. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.