

Writing Guide: **Comma**

1. Use commas **between three or more items in a list**. Those items may be single words or phrases.

The basket held apples, oranges, and bananas.

The director hires workers, writes quarterly reports, and manages the budget.

2. Use a comma **before a coordinating conjunction that joins two independent clauses**.

Note: There are seven coordinating conjunctions: *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*.

Note: An independent clause is a word group that can stand alone as a sentence.

The reporter likes the semicolon, but the editor prefers the period.

A storm was brewing, so the picnickers decided to pack up the baskets.

3. Use a comma **after an introductory word group**.

When the tide is high, people should leave the beach.

During the summer after her senior year, she worked as lifeguard.

4. Use commas to **set off conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases**: *therefore*, *however*, *consequently*, *for example*, *on the other hand*, *in fact*, and others.

Grammar, as a matter of fact, is her specialty.

Nevertheless, the army continued its advance.

5. Use commas to **separate phrases of attribution from quoted material**.

The man in the back of the room said, "I can't hear the lecturer."

"English teachers especially are prone to stress-related illnesses," declares the writer of a recent newspaper editorial.

6. Use commas to **set off contrasted elements**.

The dash, unlike the semicolon, can indicate a dramatic shift in thought.



That girl looks like her mother, not her father.

7. Use commas to **separate cumulative adjectives**, that is, adjectives that can take the word “and” between them.

The chairperson is a friendly, energetic leader.

It’s nice to sit in a warm, comfortable chair.

8. Use commas to **set off nonrestrictive elements**.

Gandhi, a fervent believer in nonviolent protest, has inspired many leaders.

The youngest brother, believing that he could fly, jumped off the roof of the playhouse.