

# Common Comma Usage

Commas are an important part of structuring sentences. They help readers understand which ideas are grouped together or separate and how ideas are related to each other. These guidelines and examples will help you master your comma usage. Hang in there—they get easier with practice!

## FANBOYS

FANBOYS, a mnemonic device, represents coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

Use a comma **before** a FANBOYS conjunction to join two sentences together. Both halves of the sentence must have a separate subject and verb to connect them with a comma.

Read what comes after FANBOYS all by itself. If it is not a complete thought (i.e. missing a separate subject or verb), use FANBOYS without a comma.

Complete thought      comma + FANBOYS      Complete thought

The trip was long, and we almost missed our flight.

My dog loves to play, so I gave him a new ball.

Carr thinks technology is harmful, but Goldsmith disagrees.

Complete thought      FANBOYS      Incomplete thought

The trip was long and way too expensive.

My dog will chase his tail or roll in the mud.

I ate the last cookie but will share this carrot with you.

## Introductory Information

Introductory words and phrases help share context information with readers and transition between ideas.

Use a comma after the introductory word or phrase to signal that the sentence's main idea is coming next.

Introductory information + comma      Complete thought

Generally, students arrive at least 5 minutes early for class.

For example, 80% of them were seated before 2:00 today.

Although two students were late, we began class on time.

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## Interrupters

Writers sometimes add context information for readers within sentences. It interrupts the main idea, and, often, the sentence can function without the interrupter. We surround the interrupter with commas to signal that the information is less important.

Surround an interrupting word or phrase with commas. If the interrupter appears at the end of the sentence, use a comma at the beginning and a period at the end.



We disagree, however, about the implementation plan.

Sam Lee, a professor at Harvard, explained the project.

The textbook is useful, which is why I bought it.

## Quotations

Commas signal that a direct quotation is coming next. This rule is often used when introducing a source's quotation in essays or dialogue in stories.

Use a comma to separate the name of a speaker and their direct quotation.



Sam Lee explained, "This will be the future of education."

"This will be the best event ever," Donna said.

According to Smith, "Humanity should be concerned."

## Lists

Commas help readers understand the separation between items when listing 3+ things in a row.

Use a comma between each item of the list. The last item of the list comes after a comma + FANBOY (often and / or) to signal that the list is ending.



We saw lions, bears, and unattended children at the zoo.

I enjoy hiking forests, reading books, and playing piano.

Let's order BBQ, pizza, or tacos for dinner.