

Commas

APSU Writing Center Handout

Commas signal pauses and help clarify relationships between ideas.

Commas in a List

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

Example: I went to the store to buy milk, bread, and eggs.

Commas with Cities and States

If the items in the list already contain commas (such as cities and states), use semicolons to separate the larger units.

- **Example:** I have lived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Denver, Colorado; and Clarksville, Tennessee.

Commas with Coordinating Conjunctions

The coordinating conjunctions are: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

Use a comma before one of these conjunctions only when it joins two complete sentences (independent clauses).

- **Example:** I might have continued my studies, but something inside me told me to start working.

Replace the conjunction with a period. If both sides can stand alone, use a comma.

Dependent (Subordinate) Clauses

When a dependent clause begins a sentence, place a comma after it.

- **Example:** After I arrived at the baseball field, it started to rain.

If the dependent clause comes at the end, do not use a comma.

- **Example:** It started to rain after I arrived at the baseball field.

Introductory Participial Phrases

Participial phrases (often ending in “**ing**”) that introduce a sentence need a comma.

- **Example:** Having finally arrived for my appointment, we began the session.

Be sure the word immediately following the comma is what the phrase describes.

Introductory Prepositional Phrases

Short introductory prepositional phrases may or may not take a comma.

Both examples are correct:

- In the morning, I ran a 5K.
- In the morning I ran a 5K.

However, longer introductory phrases typically take a comma.

- **Example:** In the middle of summer, my town holds its annual festival.

Appositives

An appositive renames or describes a noun.

- **Example:** I walk Fido, my dog, every morning.
- **Example:** My dad, a man who has worked his entire life, just retired.

Transitional Words

Words such as however, therefore, and nevertheless require commas.

At the beginning of a sentence: However, I still couldn't ride the roller coaster.

In the middle of a sentence: I may like pizza, but I do not, however, like pineapple on it.

Commas with Adjectives

When two adjectives equally describe a noun, use a comma between them.

- **Example:** There is a big, beautiful tree in the field.

Commas with Direct Quotations

Use a comma to introduce a quotation.

- **Example:** Philip asked, "Did you schedule an appointment?"

Practice Using Commas

Add commas where needed to the sentences below:

I went to the APSU Writing Center to get help creating my outline title page and thesis statement.

When you come to the Writing Center you can expect to collaborate with a thoughtful reader in a friendly low-stakes environment.

If you have multiple papers you want to submit please send each as a separate submission to avoid confusion.

If you leave out the clause phrase or word does the sentence still make sense?

Sarah spends time after class painting baking and reading.

Philip asked "Did you schedule an appointment with a tutor?"

Answer Key

1. I went to the APSU Writing Center to get help creating my outline, title page, and thesis statement.
2. When you come to the Writing Center, you can expect to collaborate with a thoughtful reader in a friendly, low-stakes environment.
3. If you have multiple papers you want to submit, please send each as a separate submission to avoid confusion.
4. If you leave out the clause, phrase, or word, does the sentence still make sense?
5. Sarah spends time after class painting, baking, and reading.
6. Philip asked, "Did you schedule an appointment with a tutor?"
7. I saw that he was busy, so I scheduled an appointment with him for later in the week.

References

Texas A&M University Writing Center. (n.d.). *Commas*. <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/writing-speaking-guides/commas>

University of Wisconsin–Madison Writing Center. (n.d.). *Using commas*.
<https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/commas/>

Utah Valley University Writing Center. (n.d.). *Commas*.
<https://www.uvu.edu/writingcenter/handouts/commas.html>