

## Commas

There are SIX basic rules for the use of COMMAS.

1. Use a COMMA before a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, or, nor, yet, so) when it connects two independent clauses. (Clauses that can stand alone.)

We may leave Friday, or we may wait until Monday.

2. Use a COMMA between items in a series. The items do not have to be single words.

Red, blue, green, yellow, and brown are colors.

She put down the phone, picked up her purse, and left.

Some words go together and do not need COMMAS.

The dear little old lady.

To tell whether you use COMMAS – insert “and” in place of the COMMA and see if it still sounds right.

Treat addresses or dates used in a sentence as a series, putting a COMMA after every item, including the last one.

He was born on May 17, 1959, in Beverly, Massachusetts, and grew up there.

3. Put a COMMA after an introductory expression that does not flow smoothly into the sentence.

This expression may be a word, a group of words, or a dependent clause.

Yes, I'll go. Moreover, the umpire agreed with me. Running down the hall, she slipped and fell.

4. Put COMMAS around the name of a person spoken to.

I think, Anna, that you are right. John, how about a game of tennis? I've finished washing the car, Sarah.

5. Put COMMAS around an expression that interrupts the flow of the sentence.

These expressions include words such as however, moreover, finally, therefore, of course, by the way, on the other hand, I am sure, and I think.

I hope, of course, that they will come. We took our plates, therefore, and got in line. It should, I think, take only an hour.

If the expression does not interrupt the flow of the sentence, no COMMA is required.

Of course I hope they'll come. Therefore we took our plates and got in line. I think it should take only an hour.

6. Put COMMAS around nonessential material. (These are sometimes called asides.)

Such material may be interesting, but the main idea of the sentence would be clear without it.

Mike Jones, who is running for mayor, will speak tonight.

COMPARE:

The woman who is running for mayor will speak tonight.

*The Grapes of Wrath*, a novel by John Steinbeck, was a best seller.

COMPARE:

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* was a best seller.

Adapted from *The Least You Should Know About English*