

# Scientific Writing Course Commas

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A decorative graphic consisting of several horizontal lines of varying lengths and colors (teal, light blue, white) extending from the right side of the slide towards the center.

# Motivation



# Motivation

**Let's eat grandpa.**  
**Let's eat, grandpa.**

Correct punctuation saves lives.

# Motivation

**COMMAS ARE IMPORTANT**



**ALICIA KEYS  
IS A PRETTY, BLACK WOMAN**



**WHOOPI GOLDBERG  
IS A PRETTY BLACK, WOMAN**

# Commas

- Rule 1: To avoid confusion, use commas to separate words and word groups with a series of three or more.
- Example: *My \$10 million estate is to be split among my husband, daughter, son, and nephew.*
- Rule 2: Use a comma to separate two adjectives when the word *and* can be inserted between them.
- Example: *He is a strong, healthy man.*
- Example: *We stayed at an expensive summer resort*

# Commas

- Rule 3: Use a comma when an *-ly* adjective is used with other adjectives.
- Example: *Felix was a lonely, young boy.*
- Rule 4: Use commas before or surrounding the name or title of a person directly addressed.
- Example: *Will you, Aisha, do that assignment for me? Yes, Doctor, I will.*

# Commas

- Rule 5(a): Use a comma to separate the day of the month from the year and after the year.
- Example: *Kathleen met her husband on December 5, 2003, in Mill Valley, California.*
- Rule 5(b): If any part of the date is omitted, leave out the comma.
- Example: *They met in December 2003 in Mill Valley.*

# Commas

- Rule 6: Use a comma to separate the city from the state and after the state in a document. If you use the two-letter capitalized form of a state in a document, you do not need a comma after the state.
- Example: *I lived in San Francisco, California, for 20 years.*
- Example: *I lived in San Francisco, CA for 20 years.*

# Commas

- Rule 7: Use commas to surround degrees or titles used with names. Commas are no longer required around *Jr.* and *Sr.* Commas never set off *II*, *III*, and so forth.
- Example: *Al Mooney, M.D., knew Sam Sunny Jr. and Charles Starr III.*
- Rule 8: Use commas to set off expressions that interrupt sentence flow.
- Example: *I am, as you have probably noticed, very nervous about this.*

# Commas

- Rule 9: When starting a sentence with a weak clause, use a comma after it. Conversely, do not use a comma when the sentence starts with a strong clause followed by a weak clause.
- Example: *If you are not sure about this, let me know now.*
- Example: *Let me know now if you are not sure about this.*

# Commas

- Rule 10: Use a comma after phrases of more than three words that begin a sentence. If the phrase has fewer than three words, the comma is optional.
- Example: *To apply for this job, you must have previous experience.*
- Example: *On February 14 many couples give each other candy or flowers.*

# Commas

- Rule 11: If something or someone is sufficiently identified, the description following it is considered nonessential and should be surrounded by commas.
- Example: *Freddy, who has a limp, was in an auto accident.*
- Example: *The boy who has a limp was in an auto accident.*

# Commas

- Rule 12: Use a comma to separate two strong clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction--*and, or, but, for, nor*. You can omit the comma if the clauses are both short.
- Example: *I have painted the entire house, but he is still working on sanding the doors.*
- Example: *I paint and he writes.*
- Rule 13: Use the comma to separate two sentences if it will help avoid confusion.
- Example: *I chose the colors red and green, and blue was his first choice.*

# Commas

- Rule 14: A **comma splice** is an error caused by joining two strong clauses with only a comma instead of separating the clauses with a conjunction, a semicolon, or a period. A **run-on sentence**, which is incorrect, is created by joining two strong clauses without any punctuation.
- Incorrect: *Time flies when we are having fun, we are always having fun.* (Comma splice)
- Incorrect: *Time flies when we are having fun we are always having fun.* (Run-on sentence)
- Correct: *Time flies when we are having fun, and we are always having fun.*

# Commas

- Rule 15: If the subject does not appear in front of the second verb, do not use a comma.
- Example: *He thought quickly but still did not answer correctly.*
- Rule 16: Use commas to introduce or interrupt direct quotations shorter than three lines.
- Example: *He actually said, "I do not care."*
- Example: *"Why," I asked, "do you always forget to do it?"*

# Commas

- Rule 17: Use a comma to separate a statement from a question.
- Example: *I can go, can't I?*
- Rule 18: Use a comma to separate contrasting parts of a sentence.
- Example: *That is my money, not yours.*
- Rule 19: Use a comma when beginning sentences with introductory words such as *well, now,* or *yes*.
- Example: *Yes, I do need that report.*

# Commas

- Rule 20: Use commas surrounding words such as *therefore* and *however* when they are used as interrupters.
- Example: *I would, therefore, like a response.*
- Example: *I would be happy, however, to volunteer for the Red Cross.*
- Rule 21: Use either a comma or a semicolon before introductory words such as *namely*, *that is*, *i.e.*, *for example*, *e.g.*, or *for instance* when they are followed by a series of items. Use a comma after the introductory word.
- Example: *You may be required to bring many items, e.g., sleeping bags, pans, and warm clothing.*