

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*

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- 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.*

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- 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.*

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- 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.*

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- 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.*

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- 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.*

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- 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.*

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- 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.*

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- 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.*

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- 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?"*

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- 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.*