

ARC Writing Lab Worksheets:
Comma Usage

Final draft version, compiled February 9, 2007, by J. Hines, Ed Prgms Intern

Commas Set Things Off...

Commas Put Things Together:

- In standard, non-journalistic writing, use a comma to separate dependent elements in a series of three or more: “Father’s estate was divided between George, Sally, and Frank.”
Adjectives that describe something together are also separated by a comma: “It was a dark, stormy night.”
- Use a comma and an “and/but” FANBOYS conjunction (see **sidebar**) to separate coordinated independent elements, or sentences put in the same way and placed together in a sentence: “Joey played the guitar, and Janey sang along.”

Commas Follow Introductory Words, Phrases, and Clauses:

- Use a comma, or a pair of commas, to set off the name of someone being addressed: “Dr. Jacobs, I loved your seminar on grammar. By the way, Mrs. Staley, thank you for inviting her. I am talking to you, Ms. Jones.”
- Use a comma to separate a quotation from a “signal” phrase: “Joey said, ‘Janey’s singing is lovely.’ ” If you introduce a quote this way, do not use *said that* followed by quotation marks; the word *that* tells readers to expect a paraphrase.
- Use a comma to separate introductory words or phrases:
 - “After studying, Diane went to sleep.”
 - “When the workshop was announced, I signed up.”
 - “No, I don’t have any milk.”

In Parenthetical Statements (Extra Information):

- Use a pair of commas to set off parenthetical remarks: “Dr. Jacobs, our instructor, gave a lecture on comma use.”
- Use a comma to separate a contradictory element or to restate something: “She has visited New York, but not Los Angeles.”

Problems with Comma Usage Can Be Fixed by...

- Knowing the rules and being sure of them. Practice with the attached sheet.
- Reading sentences aloud to see if comma “pauses” make sense. Do not insert unneeded commas.

**“FANBOYS”
Conjunctions**

FOR

AND

NOR

BUT

OR

YET

STILL

Practice Sheet

Insert commas if and where necessary in the following sentences:

1. Contrary to what most people think milk is not good for kittens.
2. Mr. Ramsay asked if we could finish the report as soon as possible.
3. Serious problems may be prevented if we plan now for possible future energy shortages by learning how to conserve by seeking new sources of energy and by stockpiling fossil fuels like coal and oil.
4. Just to remind you Nelly an appositive is a word or phrase that renames or re-states another word or phrase like when you say “George Washington our first president was elected unanimously by the Electoral College.”
5. I had no idea Wolverine was anything but a pleasant normal man with a funny nickname.

Solutions to exercises on next page. Do not look until you have tried at least twice!

Most exercises above adapted from Fergenson, Laraine. (1989). *Writing with style: Rhetoric, reader, handbook*. Forth Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Solutions to “Practice Sheet”

1. Contrary to what most people think, milk is not good for kittens. *The comma highlights that the first half of the sentence is the reverse of the second.*
2. Mr. Ramsay asked if we could finish the report as soon as possible. *No change is necessary. (Remember: “Do not insert unneeded commas.”)*
3. Serious problems may be prevented if we plan now for possible future energy shortages by learning how to conserve, by seeking new sources of energy, and by stockpiling fossil fuels like coal and oil. *Here, commas mark off individual items in the list (each a whole phrase) for clarity.*
4. Just to remind you, Nelly, an appositive is a word or phrase that renames or re-states another word or phrase, like when you say, “George Washington, our first president, was elected unanimously by the Electoral College.” *Three rules show up: the name of someone being addressed is set off, a quote is marked off from its signal (“when you say”), and two things are re-stated/given examples for: “re-states another word or phrase” and “George Washington” (in the quote).*
5. I had no idea Wolverine was anything but a pleasant , normal man with a funny nickname. *Two adjectives describing something equally are divided by a comma.*