

COMMON COMMAS

A Utah State University Writing Center Resource

INTRODUCTORY PHRASES

Separate introductory phrases (e.g., clarifying or background information) from the rest of the sentence.

- Before we go to the store, we need to create a grocery list.
- While getting ready for bed, Amber received a phone call.
- However, I do not believe him.

THE OXFORD

The Oxford comma is the last comma in a list of 3+ items. Style guides have varying attitudes towards it.

- I like apples, cakes and bananas. (no Oxford comma)
- I enjoy running, biking, and hiking. (Oxford comma included)
- I went to lunch with Sarah, my best friend, and roommate. (Oxford comma for clarity -- three different people listed)

MID-SENTENCE CLARIFICATIONS

Use commas to set off phrases (aka, relative clauses) that add extra clarifying information in the middle of the sentence.

- Jared said that the tomatoes, which he had been caring for all summer, had died in the first fall frost.
- Einstein, who was born in Germany, is famous for his theory of relativity.

CAUSE/EFFECT & BECAUSE

When creating if/then or causal statements, use a comma.

- If you love me, then you'll buy me tacos.
- A comma is typically only necessary when starting a sentence with "because."
- Because he was late, he received detention.
- He received detention because he was late.

COMBINING SENTENCES

When combining *complete sentences* with a coordinating conjunction (e.g., and, but, so, for, yet, etc.), use a comma.

- I like cake. I love cookies. (Two complete sentences)
- I like cake, and I love cookies.
- I like cake and love cookies. (Not two complete sentences)

THE COMMA SPLICE

Do NOT combine *complete sentences* with just a comma.

- I like cake, I love cookies. (Comma splice!)
- Fixes:
 - I like cake, and I love cookies. (conjunction)
 - I like cake; I love cookies. (semicolon)
 - I like cake. I love cookies. (periods)

QUOTATIONS & DIALOGUE

Commas go *inside* quotation marks.

- "She proved rather boring," he said.
- Many dream images were characterized as "raw," "powerful," and "evocative" (Arie 10).

CITATIONS

Commas (and periods!) go *outside* quotation marks when used with in-text citations.

- At the end of the novel, sitting "in a square of sunlight granted by a clerestory window far above their imaginations" (Howie 437), Wolf and Bear reappear.