



WRITING CENTER

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Comma Use

Commas are punctuation marks that divide sentences into shorter, more manageable segments. Commas are used:

- after introductory words and phrases that come before the main subject and verb in a sentence:

In Maxine Hong Kingston's "Photograph of My Parents," a daughter talks about her parents by analyzing family photographs.

Frustrated and exhausted, I returned home.

- with conjunctions that join independent clauses:

I picked out the brightest fruit at the grocery store, but it still tasted sour.

We looked for the best deal on new cars, and we bought the car that most adequately met our needs.

- to separate three or more items in a series:

The cat spent all day cleaning itself, eating, and sleeping.

The most important aspects of his speech were its encouraging tone, its upbeat attitude, and its dramatic language.

- with appositives (a noun phrase that describes another noun phrase) and other clauses embedded in a sentence:

Susan, one of my fellow tutors at the Writing Center, is traveling to Europe next week for vacation.

My first car, a 1976 Oldsmobile Cutlass, was a gift from my mother and grandmother.

When the modifying clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence, omit the comas:

It was apparent that the dogs that had been the most neglected would need the most love and attention.

- to set off dates and addresses:

I was first introduced to my best friend on October 13, 1981 at a coffee shop downtown.

- to ensure clarity:

While I worked on my paper, my brother played video games.

*Note the confusion that might occur if the comma was omitted.

- in dialogue with speech tags:

“I’m tired of eating peanut butter all the time,” she complained loudly. “It’s boring!”

* If any other punctuation is used in quotations, that punctuation takes the place of the comma:

“Why do I always have to wash the dishes?” he asked.

All commas, periods, exclamation points, and question marks are placed inside quotation marks.