

Dr. Jamison's Top Five Comma Rules:

1. Use a comma after any introductory adverbial information.

This adverbial information may be a single word or simple adverb phrase:

A. Yesterday, Jimbo ate ice cream.

Or a prepositional phrase:

B. Over the years, Jimbo has eaten gallons of ice cream.

Or a subordinate clause

C. Because it is his favorite dessert, Jimbo eats great quantities of ice cream.

(If the subordinate clause is at the end of the sentence, no comma is necessary: Jimbo eats great quantities of ice cream because it is his favorite dessert.)

2. Use a comma when separating two independent clauses (sentences) that are joined by coordinate conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

Gertrude desperately wanted a date to the prom, so she invited her ninety-year old neighbor.

3. Use commas to separate items in a series.

These items may be single words:

A. Bertha, Herman, and Harold sauntered into the bar.

Or they may be phrases:

B. Bertha sauntered into the bar, eclipsed a barstool, ordered a beer, and belched loudly.

Or they may even be independent clauses:

C. Bertha ordered a beer, Herman ordered a whiskey, and Harold ordered chocolate milk.

4. Use commas to separate coordinate adjectives.

(Note that coordinate adjectives can be reversed, or the word *and* can be inserted between them.)

Septimus has a large, protruding nose.

But no comma is needed here:

Horatio has a yellow rubber duck

5. Use commas to isolate nonrestrictive (non-essential) information from the rest of the sentence.

Chaucer's final tale, "The Parson's Tale," is essentially a lengthy sermon.

But not

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USE A SEMI-COLON AS FOLLOWS:

1. **Use a semi-colon to separate independent clauses that are closely related.**
Brenda is extremely fond of cats; she currently owns fifteen of them.
2. **Use a semi-colon to separate independent clauses that are linked with a conjunctive adverb.**
Brenda has fifteen cats; consequently, her house smells like a big litter box.
3. **Use a semi-colon to separate items in a long series that might otherwise be confusing.**
I am close friends with Mickey, who lives across the street from me; Joanne, whom I have known since kindergarten; and Jocinda, who recently moved to France.

USE A COLON AS FOLLOWS:

1. **Use a colon to introduce a list.**
Prunella purchased the following items: a hoe, a shovel, and an axe.
2. **Use a colon to introduce an explanation.**
Prunella had a good reason for purchasing gardening items: she was planning to grow her own produce.
NOTE: A COLON SHOULD FOLLOW A COMPLETE THOUGHT.
WRONG- Prunella bought: a hoe, a shovel, and an axe.

USE PARENTHESES TO DE-EMPHASIZE INFORMATION. THEY CAN BE USED AS FOLLOWS:

1. My old cat Boo (who lived to be twenty-two years old) had a tangled mass of black fur.
OR
2. My old cat Boo had a tangled mass of black fur. (He lived to be twenty-two years old.)

USE DASHES TO EMPHASIZE INFORMATION. THEY ARE USED AS FOLLOWS:

My neighbor's children—all six of them—sometimes use my garden as a sand box.