

Comma Rules

1 Use a comma **to separate the elements in a series** (three or more things), including the last two.

He hit the ball, dropped the bat, and ran to first base.

2 Use a **comma + a little conjunction** (and, but, for, nor, yet, or, so) **to connect two independent clauses**.

He hit the ball well, **but** he ran toward third base.

3 Use a comma **to set off introductory elements**.

Running toward third base, he suddenly realized how stupid he looked.

4 Use a comma **to set off parenthetical elements**.

The Founders Bridge, *which spans the Connecticut River*, is falling down.

Cal's ambition, *to become a goalie in professional soccer*, is within his reach.

Ellen, *his wife of thirty years*, suddenly decided to open her own business.

Because Tess had learned to study by herself, she was able to pass the entrance exam.

The Red Sox were leading the league at the end of May, *but of course*, they always do well in the spring.

The Yankees didn't do so well in the early going, *but frankly*, everyone expects them to win the season.

The Tigers spent much of the season at the bottom of the league, *and even though they picked up several promising rookies*, they expect to be there again next year.

We visited Hartford, *Connecticut*, last summer.

Paris, *France*, is sometimes called "The City of Lights."

5

Use a comma **to separate coordinate adjectives**.

See that tall, distinguished, good looking fellow (as opposed to "See the little old lady").

If you can put an *and* or a *but* between the adjectives, a comma will probably belong there. For instance, you could say, "He is a tall and distinguished man" or "I live in a very old and run-down house." So you would write, "He is a tall, distinguished man" and "I live in a very old, run-down house." But you would probably not say, "She is a little and old lady," or "I live in a little and purple house," so commas would not appear between *little* and *old* or between *little* and *purple*.

6

Use a comma to set off quoted elements.

Summing up this argument, Peter Day writes, "*The strength of the romance could be seen in the relationship between the two lovers.*"

"*The question is,*" said Alice, "*whether you can make words mean so many things.*"

"*I should like to buy an egg, please,*" she said timidly. "*How do you sell them?*"

7

Use commas to set off phrases that express contrast.

Some say the world will end in ice, *not fire*.

It was her money, *not her charm or personality*, that first attracted him.

The puppies were cute, *but very messy*.

8

Use a comma **to avoid confusion**. This is often a matter of consistently applying rule #3.

For most, the year is already finished.

Outside, the lawn was cluttered with hundreds of broken branches.

Exercise: Add a Comma

1. He walked for a long time found the right street and made his way home.
2. John did not like parties particularly not the fancy dress-up kind.
3. The boy did not want to go home then but he knew his father would be angry if he did not.
4. Annandale Virginia is where I live.
5. The Redskins did not have a good season but frankly no one thought they would.
6. Aiming at the bird the hunter pulled the trigger.
7. To everyone the winter seemed very long.
8. The apartment looked nice and new but it was empty of furniture.
9. She saw the tall lanky dark-haired stranger heading toward her.
10. Sally asked "Would you like to get some coffee?"
11. He had lived in Detroit Michigan all his life.
12. "If you have to leave now" Tom said "please take some cake with you."
13. When the snow stopped falling the kids ran out to play.
14. Paul needed to stop at the grocery store return the video and pick up his boys on the way home.
15. Because it was too late to see the movie they went to dinner instead.