

## Comma Use Guidelines

Commas are used to indicate pauses between parts of sentences, to create compound sentences, and to separate items within lists. The basic rules governing comma use can be reviewed below.

Rules for WHEN TO USE a comma	
Between two independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction (called a compound sentence)	The library was open, but the Cyber Cafe was closed.
After most introductory words, phrases, or clauses	After she got the assignment, she went to the library.
To set off extra information	Her father, a dentist, never kept candy in the house.
To set off a transitional expression/explanatory insert	The french fries, however, were cold. In fact, they were inedible.
When separating a list of three or more items*	She sat down and pulled out her textbook, notebook, and a pencil.
To separate coordinate adjectives (adjectives that may be reversed and connected with "and")	She noticed a cracked, trampled iPhone on the ground.
Before or after a quotation (inside quotation marks)	"That test was tough," he said, "but I think I aced it."

Rules for WHEN NOT TO USE a comma	
Before the word <i>and</i> that connects two verbs to the same subject	<b>No:</b> She printed the paper, and turned it in on time. <b>Yes:</b> She printed the paper and turned it in on time.
After a coordinating conjunction connecting two independent clauses. DO use a comma <i>before</i> the coordinating conjunction	<b>No:</b> She went to the post office but, it was closed. <b>Yes:</b> She went to the post office, but it was closed.
Between two independent clauses without any coordinating conjunction (use either a period or a semi-colon)	<b>No:</b> The sunshine felt good, it had been a long winter. <b>Yes:</b> The sunshine felt good; it had been a long winter.
Between an independent clause and a following dependent clause introduced by <i>after, before, because, if, since, unless, until, or when</i> (no comma before the subordinating conjunction)	<b>No:</b> Test results tend to be good, when students study in groups. <b>Yes:</b> Test results tend to be good when students study in groups.

**\*Should I observe the OXFORD COMMA (the comma before the conjunction in a list of three or more items)?** Typically, yes, but some fields, such as journalism, do not. If unsure about the use of the Oxford comma, check with your professor or consult appropriate style guidelines.