COMMAS

RULES FOR USE OF THE COMMA

RULE 1  Put a comma between items in series

Hurrah for the red, white, and blue.
She put down the phone, picked up her purse, and left.

Some words “go together” and don’t need a comma between them even though they so make up a series.

The dear little old lady
The eager little boy
The dilapidated old building

If an address or date is used in a sentence, treat it as a series, putting a comma after every item, including the last.

He was born on May 17, 1959, in Salisbury, North Carolina, and grew up there.
She lived at 2340 Tenth Avenue, Gresham, Oregon, for two years.

RULE 2  Put a comma before and, but, or, nor, yet, so, when they connect two complete thoughts.

We lost our oars, and that was the end of our boating.
We may leave Friday, or we may wait until Monday.
I wanted to go but could not get my car started.
*The last example does not have two independent clauses (it has just on subject and two verbs); therefore no comma is needed.

Comma Exercise 1

Directions: Punctuate these sentences according to the first two comma rules.
Write down the word that precedes the comma and then write the comma.

_______ 1. Our language changes slowly but it does change.
_______ 2. I never studied much in high school but I’m studying now.
_______ 3. Outward Bound gives students experience in rafting mountaineering canoeing sailing and wilderness backpacking.
_______ 4. She was born March 11 1976 in Portland Oregon but her family moved to Seattle Washington.
5. Her boyfriend is handsome personable and intelligent.
6. On the shelf were a tea set from Japan a vase from China and a piece of coral from Australia.
7. The lowest temperature ever recorded was –126.9 degrees Fahrenheit in Vostok Antarctica on August 24 1960.
8. Jupiter is the largest planet and Mercury is the smallest.
9. We must hurry to the coliseum or we’ll lose our seats for the concert.
10. I have never rafted down the Deschutes nor do I intend to.
11. They are tearing down that lovely old brick building in the park.
12. He was liked for his honesty morality and intelligence and he was respected for his hard work.
13. She prepared the breakfast got the children off to school and still got to her job on time.
14. The official air speed record now is 2070 m.p.h. made over Edwards Air Force Base California on May 1 1965.
15. Scientists dream of discovering an easy efficient economical way of harnessing the sun’s clean energy.

Answers to comma exercise 1

1. slowly, - Rule 1
2. school, - Rule 2
3. rafting, mountaineering, canoeing, sailing, - Rule 1
4. 11, 76, Portland, Oregon, Seattle, - Rule 1
5. handsome, personable, - Rule 1
6. Japan, China, - Rule 1
7. Vostok, Antartica, 24, - Rule 1
8. planet, - Rule 1
9. coliseum, - Rule 2
10. Deschutes, - Rule 2
11. No error
12. honesty, morality, intelligence, - Rule 1 and 2
13. breakfast, school, - Rule 1
14. Base, California, 1, - Rule 1
15. easy, efficient, - Rule 1
Progress Check On Commas 1

Directions: Correctly punctuate the sentences below. Write the word preceding the comma in the blank to the left, then write the comma in its proper place.

1. Never underestimate the power of a woman for she can accomplish wondrous things.
2. The Olympics were a spectacle to behold and I didn’t miss a minute of the televised broadcast.
3. Many teenagers begin working at jobs in places like McDonald’s Wendy’s Taco Time or Burgerville.
4. The highest temperature ever reached in the shade was 136.4 degrees Fahrenheit in Azizia Libya on September 13, 1922.
5. No one is fool enough to choose war instead of peace for in peace sons bury father but in war fathers bury sons.

It’s Your Turn

Directions: Write two sentences each for comma rule 1 and comma rule 2.

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________
4. __________________________________________

RULES FOR COMMAS II

RULE 3 Put a comma after an introductory expression that does not flow smoothly into the sentence. It may be a word, a group of words, or an incomplete thought.

Yes, I’ll go.
Well, that was the end of that.
Running down the hill, she slipped.
When everyone had left, the auditorium was locked for the night.

RULE 4 Put commas around the name of a person spoken to.

I think, Dorothy, you are absolutely right.
John, how about a game of golf?
I’ve finished washing the car, Lee.
Comma Exercise II

Directions: Punctuate these sentences according to comma rules 3 and 4. Write the word that precedes the comma and then write the comma.

1. For every ton of newspaper recycled 17 trees are not cut down.
2. No I would never vote for a man that says women belong in the kitchen.
3. I tell you Jackie I don’t like what’s happening in our office.
4. Whenever opportunity knocks don’t hesitate to open the door.
5. I’m afraid Mother that we’re going the wrong way.
6. Cynthia do you have the report ready yet?
7. After everyone had left the theater was closed.
8. You shouldn’t have done that Robert.
9. As you probable know someone like Joan is valuable to a company.
10. Working most of the night she finally finished the project.
11. Do you think General Patton that we should invade?
12. Because of his shady past I would be very careful.
13. Well it looks like it’s time to go.
14. You must clean your room Sarah.
15. Since his arrest he has been a changed person.

Answers to comma exercise II

1. recycled, - Rule 3
2. No, - Rule 3
3. you, Jackie, - Rule 3
4. knocks, - Rule 3
5. afraid, Mother, - Rule 4
6. Cynthia, - Rule 4
7. left, - Rule 3
8. that, - Rule 4
9. know, - Rule 3
10. night, - Rule 3
11. think, General Patton, - Rule 4
12. past, - Rule 3
13. Well, - Rule 3
14. room, - Rule 3
15. arrest, - Rule 3

Progress Check On Commas II
Directions: Correctly punctuate the sentences below. Write the word preceding the comma in the blank to the left, then write the comma in its proper place.

1. After winning the gold medal he cried like a baby.
2. You know Gill I thoroughly enjoy your company.
3. Driving though the fog he crashed into the wall.
4. Yes I have seen the exhibition at the museum.
5. No one told me you were such an accomplished typist Richard.

It's Your Turn

Directions: Write two sentences each for comma rule 3 and 4.

1. ___________________________________________________________
2. ___________________________________________________________
3. ___________________________________________________________
4. ___________________________________________________________

RULES FOR COMMAS III

RULE 5

Put commas around an expression that interrupts the flow of the sentence (such as, however, moreover, finally, therefore, of course, by the way, on the other hand, I am sure, I think).

She thought, however, that her husband would wait.
We grabbed our coats, therefore, and headed outside.
It is, in my opinion, a total waste of time.

Read the above sentences aloud, and you will hear how those expressions interrupt the flow of the sentence.

RULE 6

Put commas around unnecessary material. The material may be interesting, but the main idea of the sentence would be clear without it.
Larry Bird, who is a great basketball player, made the shot. 

*The clause who is a great basketball player is not necessary to the main idea of the sentence. Without it we still know who the sentence is about and what it did: Larry made the shot. Therefore, the unnecessary material is set off from the rest of the sentences by commas to show that it could be left out.*

See if you can find the unnecessary material in the following sentences.

**Thriller**, a video by Michael Jackson, is a best seller.

Break dancing, though quite good exercise, can be hazardous to your health.

Much American dancing, wild and crazy as it is, originates in the streets of the cities.

**Comma Exercise III**

**Directions:** Punctuate these sentences according to comma rules 5 and 6. Write the word that precedes the comma and then write the comma.

__________ 1. The person I admired most of course was my mother.
__________ 2. The story was on the whole quite entertaining.
__________ 3. Jackie Robinson the great baseball player is in the Hall of Fame.
__________ 4. Incidentally have you seen the movie playing at the Rose Moyer?
__________ 5. He is I am sure the leader of the gang.
__________ 6. We’ll have a good time nevertheless.
__________ 7. She decided by the way to invite after all.
__________ 8. Most students I think take Friday nights off.
__________ 9. The backstroke which I am just learning requires a lot of practice.
__________ 10. Believe me the answer is not correct.
__________ 11. Cherry cobbler which is really easy to make is always a popular dessert.
__________ 12. Most American homes it seems to me are cluttered with too many things.
__________ 13. A new synthetic material that has been brought out by DuPont closely resembles silk.
__________ 14. Pizza I believe is the favorite American meal.
__________ 15. By the way aren’t you glad you have finished?

**Answers for comma exercise III**

1. most, course, - Rule 5
2. was, whole, - Rule 5
3. Robinson, player - Rule 6
4. Incidentally, - Rule 5
5. is, sure, - Rule 5
6. time, - Rule 5
7. decided, way, - Rule 5
8. students, think, - Rule 5
9. backstroke, learning, - Rule 6
10. me, - Rule 5
11. cobbler, make, - Rule 6
12. homes, me, - Rule 6
13. material, DuPont, -Rule 6
14. Pizza, believe, - Rule 5
15. way, - Rule 5

Progress Check on Commas III

Directions: Correctly punctuate the sentences below. Write the word preceding the comma in the blank to the left, then write the comma in its proper place.

1. You can be sure George that your efforts are much appreciated.
2. Sewing swimming reading and biking are just a few of her hobbies.
3. My little sister searched for my love letters but she couldn’t find them.
4. If you don’t like to smoke you’d better quit.
5. After mending Emily’s mitten finding lunch money for Sarah and locating a lost workbook I finally sent the children on their way.

It’s your turn

Directions: Write two sentences for each for comma rule 5 and 6

1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________
4. __________________________