

COMMA RULES

RULE 1 Use commas to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses written in a series. **The candidate promised to lower taxes, protect the environment, and reduce crime.**

RULE 2 Use commas to separate independent clauses when they are joined by any of these seven coordinating conjunctions: *and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet*. **I have painted the entire house, but he is still working on sanding the doors.**

RULE 3 Use commas after introductory clauses, phrases, or words that come before the main clause. **While I was eating, the cat scratched at the door.**

RULE 4 Use a pair of commas in the middle of a sentence to set off clauses, phrases, and words that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence. If these words are dropped, the sentence will still make sense and retain its basic meaning. **I am, as you have probably noticed, very nervous about this.**

RULE 5 Use commas to separate two or more adjectives that describe the same noun when the word "and" can be inserted between them. **He is a strong, healthy man. (He is a strong and healthy man.)**

RULE 6 Use commas to set off all geographical names, items in dates, addresses, and titles in names. **I lived in San Francisco, California, for 20 years. (If you use the two-letter capitalized form of a state, you do not need a comma after the state.) I lived in San Francisco, CA for 20 years. Kathleen met her husband on December 5, 2003, in Mill Valley, California. (If any part of the date is omitted, leave out the comma.) They met in December 2003 in Mill Valley. Al Baker, M.D., is our family doctor.**

RULE 7 Use commas to separate a direct quotation from the rest of the sentence. **Mother asked, "Who wants to get ice cream?" "I do," he said.**

RULE 8 Use commas wherever necessary to prevent possible confusion or misreading. **To Steve, Lincoln was the greatest president.**

RULE 9 Use commas before or surrounding the name or title of a person directly addressed. **Will you, Sam, have the surgery? Yes, Doctor, I will. (Capitalize a title when directly addressing someone.)**

RULE 10 Use a comma to separate a statement from a question. **I can go, can't I?**

RULE 11 Use a comma to separate contrasting parts of a sentence. **That is my money, not yours.**

RULE 12 Use a comma when beginning sentences with introductory words such as *well, now, or yes*. **Yes, I do need that report.**

RULE 13 Use commas surrounding words such as *therefore* and *however* when they are used as interrupters. **I would, therefore, like a response. I will be happy, however, to volunteer my time.**