MAKING SENSE OF COMMAS

A comma is a form of punctuation used to separate distinct elements in a sentence, including listed items, dependent and independent clauses, transition words and phrases, and non-essential information.

Commas in a List

Use commas to separate items in lists of three or more items.

e.g., I’m studying Italian, Computer Science, Statistics, and Functions.

Commas and Introductory Phrases

Commas are used after short introductory phrases. A comma indicates that the introductory information is over and the main part of the sentence is beginning. Introductory phrases may include context about times or dates. They may also be transition words or phrases.

e.g., In 1949, Newfoundland joined Confederation.

e.g., However, many citizens remained loyal to the idea of independence.

Commas and Coordinating Conjunctions

Commas generally come before coordinating conjunctions that join independent clauses.

e.g., I was failing calculus, so my parents hired a tutor.

e.g., Students today must be better prepared than ever, for competition in the workplace is fierce.

The coordinating conjunctions can be remembered through the acronym F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.:

- F (for)
- A (and)
- N (nor)
- B (but)
- O (or)
- Y (yet)
- S (so)

Commas and Parenthetical Expressions

A parenthetical expression adds secondary or supplemental information to a sentence. Placing commas around this information indicates that the information is non-essential from a grammatical standpoint and could be removed without interfering with the overall meaning or structural completeness of the sentence.

e.g., My PSYCH 345C textbook, which costs over $175, is difficult to understand.

e.g., Marjorie, Don’s wife of thirty years, planned a surprise party for his 75th birthday.
Commas and Complex Sentences

Complex sentences are ones that contain **one independent clause** (complete sentence) and **one or more dependent clauses**. Whether or not you use a comma depends on the **order** in which the clauses are presented.

1. Dependent clause
2. Independent clause

Use a comma when a dependent clause is followed by an independent clause.

*e.g.*, *Because the course was so popular*\(^1\), *the department decided to run extra sections in the fall*\(^2\).

Do not use a comma when an independent clause is followed by a dependent clause.

*e.g.*, *The department decided to run extra sections of the course in the fall*\(^2\) *because it was so popular*\(^1\).