

Now, compare your answers to the five sentences below:

- 1. The restaurant dessert tray featured carrot cake, coconut cream pie, and one called death-by-chocolate.**
The comma separates three (or more) items in a series.
- 2. Since I was three hours short of the graduation requirements, I had to take a course during the summer.**
The comma separates an introductory phrase or dependent clause from the rest of the sentence.
- 3. The weather, according to last night's forecast, will improve by Saturday.**
The phrase "*according to last night's forecast*" interrupts the main clause, so it is set off by commas.
- 4. Students hurried to the campus store to buy their fall textbooks, but several of the books were already out of stock.**
The comma is used before a coordinating conjunction (*but*) to separate the two independent clauses.
- 5. My sister asked, "Are you going to be on the phone much longer?"**
The comma separates a direct quotation from the rest of the sentence.



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Comma Usage

Rules for Comma Usage

Comma (,)

Use a comma before *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* between two or more independent clauses.

- The director interviewed five applicants, *and* she decided to hire Mr. Jones.
- Mary enjoys drinking coffee, *but* Jim prefers green tea.

Use commas to join words or phrases in a list.

- The bank will notify all *shareholders, portfolio managers, and clients* about the new rate.
- I went to the store and bought *apples, oranges, and bananas*.

After an introductory word, a prepositional phrase, or dependent clause at the beginning of the sentence.

- *Unfortunately*, we could not get the tickets.
- *Across the street*, a new millionaire will be erecting a new building.
- *When all possible risks were analyzed*, Cara decided to purchase insurance.

Use commas to set off appositives (extra information).

- Mr. Collins, *the new dean*, proposed creating a new course on child education.
- James Joyce, *Mary's favourite author*, wrote many stories and plays.

Use a comma after the salutation or after the closing of a letter.

- *Dear Mary,*
- *Sincerely yours,*
- *Regards,*

Use a comma between the day and the year, and between city and province or country.

- *May 5, 2008*
- *London, England*

Commas can help!

Misplaced/dangling modifiers

A modifier is a word (or group of words) that describes another word and makes its meaning more specific. Often modifying phrases add information about where, when, or how something is done. A modifier works best when it is next to the word it modifies. Consider the modifying phrases (underlined> in the following two examples:



The woman tore open the package she had just received with her fingernails.

Did the woman receive the package with her fingernails? The writer meant that she tore open the package with her fingernails.



With her fingernails, the woman tore open the package she had just received.



The waiter brought the pancakes to the table covered in blueberry syrup.

What was covered with blueberry syrup? Was it the waiter, the table, or the pancakes? Actually, the pancakes were covered with syrup.



The waiter brought the pancakes, covered in blueberry syrup, to the table.

Using Commas:

Do these sentences need commas?

1. *My father went to the store for some dessert and bought ice cream.*

No, two verb phrases (“went to the store” and “bought ice cream”) describing the action of the same subject (“My father”) do not need a comma if the conjunction separating them is “and.”

2. *My father went to the store for some dessert bought ice cream and came home in time to see his favorite TV show.*

Yes, three or more verb phrases describing the action of the same subject need commas to separate them.

Practice using commas

Insert commas where needed in the following sentences, then check your answers.

1. The restaurant dessert tray featured carrot cake coconut cream pie and one called Death-by-Chocolate.
2. Since I was three hours short of the graduation requirements I had to take a course during the summer.
3. The weather according to last night's forecast will improve by Saturday.
4. Students hurried to the campus store to buy their fall textbooks but several of the books were already out of stock.
5. My sister asked "Are you going to be on the phone much longer?"