

Comma Rules

Here are the most important comma rules (for our purposes). See examples below.

1. **Introducer commas:** use a comma to offset the subject if the sentence does not begin directly with the subject, so after transition signals/connectives, subordinate clauses, prepositional phrases...

Note 1: The 3 exceptions in time order signals are *then*, *soon* and *now*, which do not require a comma.

Note 2: Do not use a comma if the subordinate clause comes at the end of a sentence.

2. **Insenter commas:** use a comma when you interrupt the logical flow-especially the “nucleus” (subject+verb+object) – of the sentence, so, for example, around transition signals in the middle of a sentence.

3. **In a list:** use a comma to separate items in a list.

4. **Coordinating commas:** use a comma to coordinate (or join) 2 independent clauses together with (don’t forget it!) a coordinating conjunction (generally one of the “fanboys”)

5. With **non-defining** adjective clauses: a relative clause with a pronoun - who, whom, whose, that, which - or an adverb clause with *when* or *where*. (See *Writing Academic English*, 4th Edition, Ch. 14.)

Examples

1. Yesterday, I did homework for three hours.

Finally, I was too tired to think.

After 16 years of smoking, it is not easy to quit.

When you start college, you sometimes have to take a placement test.

No commas:

Then I did my homework.

You sometimes have to take a placement test when you start college.

2. My father, on the other hand, has never smoked.

There is no point in trying, according to my mother, if you are not convinced.

3. I got up, took a shower, drank a cup of coffee, grabbed my books, and ran out the door.

He does not enjoy skiing, ice-skating, or sledding.

4. She has a good job, yet she is always broke.

They were tired, so they went home early.

5. Non-defining clauses

Comma: Professor Jones, who teaches my biology class, won a Nobel Prize two years ago.

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No comma: The professor who teaches my biology class won a Nobel Prize two years ago.

No comma: The lives of thousands of Germans suddenly changed on the night when East German soldiers began building the Berlin Wall.

Comma: On November 9, 1989, when the wall was torn down, their lives changed again.

Sources

Oshima A. and Hogue A., 2007, *Introduction to Academic Writing, Level 3, 3rd Edition*, Pearson Longman.

Oshima A. and Hogue A., 2006, *Writing Academic English, Level 4, 4th Edition*, Pearson Longman.

<http://www.grammarbook.com/punctuation/commas.asp>

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/02/>