

# COMMAS

## Eight Ways to Use Them

### 1. Use Commas Between All Items in a List or Series

**Rule**—Use a comma to separate each item in a list or series; a series is a group of three or more items having the same form and function in a sentence.

- i. I ate mashed potatoes, pasta, pizza, and cake at Gilman today. (series of words)
- ii. Amy plans to get good grades in all of her classes, to complete an internship this winter, and to apply to at least four graduate schools. (series of clauses)
- iii. We searched on Google, on the library website, and in the Legacy Library for the book we needed. (series of phrases)

### 2. Indicate Direct Address

**Rule**—When a speaker in a sentence names the person to whom he or she is speaking, this is called a direct address. A direct address is noted with one or more commas.

- i. Putnam, I think your team will win.
- ii. I think your team will win, Putnam.
- iii. I think your team, Putnam, will win.

### 3. After Introductory Clauses or Phrases

**Rule**—Use a comma after an introductory clause or phrase. A comma tells the reader that the introductory phrase had ended and that the main part of the sentence is about to begin.

- i. After Billy studied all night, his professor canceled the exam.
- ii. At the beginning of each new academic year, students participate in Matriculation.
- iii. First, look up any new words in a good dictionary.
- iv. Like I said before, the party will be a lot of fun.

### 4. To Separate Independent Clauses

**Rule**—Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) when it joins two independent clauses. An independent clause is a complete idea.

- i. She ran across the street, and then she called her mother.
- ii. My dog can eat dry food, or he can have canned food instead.
- iii. I don't like broccoli, nor do I like tomatoes.

### 5. Introduce direct quotations

**Rule**—A dialogue is a conversation between two or more people. If the speaker in the conversation is identified,

- i. Roger said, "Your lost backpack was turned in at the front desk."
- ii. "Your lost backpack," Roger said, "was turned in at the front desk."
- iii. "Your lost backpack was turned in at the front desk," said Roger.

## 6. Separate Non-Restrictive Clauses

**Rule**—Surround any clauses that are not essential to the meaning of a sentence with commas. Nonessential clauses are called “nonrestrictive” and essential clauses are called “restrictive.”

- iv. Sarah, whose capstone presentation is tomorrow, is going to be very busy tonight. (nonrestrictive)
- v. The dog that is sleeping outside of Andrews Hall does not belong to anyone. (restrictive)
- vi. Frank Ocean, whose new album dropped last week, will be on TV on Thursday. (nonrestrictive)

## 7. Separate Appositives (noun phrases that rename)

**Rule**—An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun. Appositives offer *nonessential information*. Only nonrestrictive appositives are marked by commas.

- iv. Rufus Putnam, the founder of Marietta, is famous throughout Marietta. (appositive)
- v. The Marietta Founder Putnam is famous throughout the city. (no appositive)
- vi. My professor, the serious one, surprised everyone by dressing up for Halloween (appositive).

## 8. Clarify Dates, Addresses, Titles, and Numbers

**Rule for Dates**—In most cases, dates are treated as a free modifier, with commas on either side. When only the month and year are given, the comma is usually omitted.

- i. The final exam is on Tuesday, December 13, 2016, in Thomas Hall.
- ii. We visited Marietta College for the first time in July 1994.

**Rule for Addresses**—The parts of a physical or mailing address are separated by commas. Zip codes, however, do not require commas.

- iii. She went to school in Marietta, Ohio, in 2005.
- i. Please send your transcript to the Marietta College Records Office at 215 Fifth Street, Marietta, OH 45750.

**Rule for Titles**—If a person’s title follows their name, separate the title from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas.

- i. Janet Bland, PhD, is our Provost and Dean of the Faculty.
- ii. I called Dr. Tynan, Chair of Mathematics, on Friday.

**Rule for Numbers**—Any number with four or more digits should be noted with commas. Start from the right, and add a comma after every three digits.

- i. Enrollment was 1,200.
- ii. Our company earned \$40, 000 last month.
- iii. More than 3,000,000 people visit the landmark each year.