

COMMA USAGE



College of the
Siskiyou
WRITING LAB

INTRODUCTION: Commas are probably the most common form of punctuation used by writers, but they are also probably the most misused. It seems like some writers put commas in a cup, shake them up, and scatter them across the paper. Although this approach seems to be common practice, there is a better way. Many comma problems, in fact most, can be solved by reviewing a few basic guidelines. The guidelines, which are listed below, will help clarify the comma's functions. We hope you agree that the comma is a valuable, flexible, creative tool for writing clearly.

For most writing, comma usage can be separated into six basic categories:

1) Joining Independent Clauses with a Coordinating Conjunction

- **For, and, nor, but, or, yet, so—also known as FANBOYS—are the coordinating conjunctions.**

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2) Separating Items in a Series

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3) Separating Introductions from the Main Clause

- **The introductory clause is the dependent clause, and the main clause is the independent clause.**

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4) Separating Nonessential Material

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5) Separating Coordinate Adjectives

- **Coordinate adjectives modify a noun separately. Adjectives that can be joined with *and* are coordinate, so use commas to separate them.**

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6) Other Standard Uses

- Introducing direct quotations:
Joe said, "Commas are easy now."
- In dates and addresses:
October 10, 2004
Weed, CA
- In long numbers:
\$1,000,000
- In salutations and closings:
Dear John, I'm leaving.
Goodbye, Jane