

Comma Errors

Marked as “P,”

In Standard English, **commas play an important role in making sentence sense** for both readers and writers. Although many comma rules exist, writers can familiarize themselves with the basic rules that we have listed here to help ensure correct comma usage.

Comma Usage Tips

The following examples are illustrations of common errors involving missing commas:

Use a comma before coordinating conjunctions (e.g., *and*, *but*, or *so*) linking independent clauses (clauses that are complete sentences):

Example: I wrote my first paper but I did not start on my next assignment.

Corrected: I wrote my first paper, but I did not start on my next assignment.
[comma with two independent clauses and a conjunction]

Use a comma after introductory adverb clauses and, often, after introductory phrases:

Example: After I drove home I realized I had forgotten my book at school.

Corrected: After I drove home, I realized I had forgotten my book at school.
[comma after introductory adverb clause]

Use commas before and after non-restrictive elements and other parenthetical elements:

Example: The business school students who for months worked diligently celebrated at the end-of-semester party. [restrictive: only some students worked diligently]

Corrected: The business school students, who for months worked diligently, celebrated at the end-of-semester party. [non-restrictive: all students worked diligently]

Example: The students can of course postpone the party.

Corrected: The students can, of course, postpone the party. [parenthetical element]

Avoid Unnecessary Commas

The following examples are illustrations of common errors involving unnecessary commas:

Do not separate a verb or preposition from its object with a comma:

Example: I hope to send to you before Monday, an updated résumé. [the verb “to send” is separated from object “an updated resume”]

Corrected: I hope to send to you before Monday an updated résumé.

Do not place a comma after a coordinating conjunction followed by an independent clause:

Example: John finished the essay but, he did not print it out.

Corrected: John finished the essay, but he did not print it out.

Do not use a comma after the last item in a series:

Example: Do not forget your paper, pencil, and identification, if you want to take the exam.

Corrected: Do not forget your paper, pencil, and identification if you want to take the exam.

Do not use commas before and after restrictive elements (clauses that change a sentence’s basic meaning):

Example: The classrooms, on the third floor, are larger than those on the fourth.

Corrected: The classrooms on the third floor are larger than those on the fourth.

<p>For more information on Comma Usage, see pp. 99-105 of the <i>Business Writer’s Handbook</i>.</p>
