

Student Guide to Commas, Fragments, and Run-Ons

Commas help readers understand how ideas in a sentence fit together. Missing or misplaced commas can change meaning or create confusion.

Common Uses of Commas

1

Joining Two Independent Clauses:

Use a comma with a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

Correct:

The experiment was challenging, but the results were clear.

Incorrect:

No FANBOY!

The experiment was challenging, the results were clear.

**Note- If each side of your comma can stand alone, you need a FANBOY after the comma in order to avoid a comma splice!!*

2

After Introductory Words or Phrases

Correct:

After reviewing the data, we revised our hypothesis.

3

In a Series (Lists of Three or More)

Correct:

The study examined age, income, and education level.

4

Around Nonessential Information (Interrupters)

Correct:

Removing this would not cause sentence to be incomplete, thus, it is an interrupter.

The professor, who specializes in linguistics, assigned the article.

Common Comma Mistakes

- ◆ Using a comma to join two complete sentences (comma splice)
- ◆ Adding commas where they interrupt the main idea
- ◆ Forgetting commas after introductory phrases

Writing Center Tip: *If both sides of a comma can stand alone as sentences, you probably need more than just a comma (e.g. a FANBOY or semicolon)*