

# Commas



# Commas with Coordinating Conjunctions



- Use commas and a coordinating conjunction (***and, or, nor, for, but, yet, and so***) to join two independent clauses
  - I released the dog's leash, and the dog trotted off across the field.
- If the main clauses are very short, it is okay to skip the comma before the coordinating conjunction, but it is **NEVER** okay to skip the coordinating conjunction.
  - Comma Splice: We crossed the meadow, then we headed toward the mountain.
  - Revised: We crossed the meadow, and then we headed toward the mountain.

# Comma After Introductory Transitional Words or Expressions



- These phrases should be followed by a comma:
  - After all,
  - As a result,
  - For example,
  - For instance,
  - In addition,
  - In fact,
  - In other words,
  - On the contrary,
  - On the other hand,

# Commas for Clarity



- Use commas to set off participial phrases at the ends of sentences if they **modify the subject**
  - The doctor rushed quickly to the accident victim, fumbling to open his black bag.
- Do not use a comma to set off a participial phrase at the end of a sentence if the phrase **modifies the preceding noun**
  - The doctor rushed quickly toward the accident victim lying face down on the soft shoulder of the road.

# Commas to Avoid Confusion



- Use a comma to separate parts of a sentence if failing to separate them would confuse your reader
  - Original: Every time John ate his dog wanted to eat too.
  - Revised: Every time John ate, his dog wanted to eat too.

# A Rule



- The rule: Extra information, extra commas; needed information, no commas.
- Buddy, a T-Rex, was adopted by a Pteranodon family on the show *Dinosaur Train*.
  - The point is that Buddy was adopted. The fact that he is a T-Rex is extra information for the reader, because it is not necessary to know his species in order to understand that he was adopted.
- Anyone who watches *Dinosaur Train* knows that Troodonts are the smartest dinosaurs.
  - Here, “who watches *Dinosaur Train*” is necessary information. Otherwise, the sentence would mean that anyone knows Troodonts are the smartest dinosaur, rather than specifically people who watch *Dinosaur Train*.

# Extra Information = Extra Commas



- The man with the curled mustache is the villain.
  - This implies that there are several men in view and that the one with the curled mustache is the one we're talking about.
- Snidely Whiplash, with the curled mustache, is the show's villain.
  - Here, “with the curled mustache” just gives us extra information about the villain, Snidely Whiplash.



# Commas to Separate Items in a Series



- When listing items, use commas to separate them. The comma before the word “and” or “or” isn’t always necessary, but sometimes the sentence will be too confusing if you omit it.
- We had several kinds of ice cream at the party: vanilla, mint chocolate chip, cookies and cream and rum raisin.
- Clearer: We had several kinds of ice cream at the party: vanilla, mint chocolate chip, cookies and cream, and rum raisin.



# Other Comma Uses



## ● Dates

- April 20, 2010
  - Luckily, in MLA format we use the European format of dating (date month year) – 20 April 2010

## ● Places

- Fort Myers, Florida
- London, England
- Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
  
- In a sentence, commas also go after the place and date, if the sentence continues.
- We drove to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on August 17, 2010, in record time.

# Semi-Colons



- If the items in the series are long and detailed, semi-colons may be more useful. This is especially true if the items you are listing need commas themselves.
- For example: We went to London and visited the Victoria and Albert Museum, which had a fashion exhibit; the Tate Modern, which had a slide exhibit; and a pub, which had lots of beer.

# Parenthetical or Interrupting Elements



- Use commas to set off words/phrases/clauses that interrupt the flow of the sentence. Generally, if in doubt, read your sentence out loud and put in commas where you would naturally pause.
- The man at the front desk, not the mechanic, was the one who quoted me the price.
- “I’m telling you, Napoleon, you don’t want to invade Russia in the winter,” said Josephine wisely.



# Dialogue



- Rules for commas in dialogue are slightly different. What do you notice about the following passage?

“Oh, boy! What a terrific day!” said Suzie.

“Yes, Suzie, it is,” Billy replied.

“There’s never been a better day,” Suzie continued. Her ridiculously cheerful expression irked Billy.

“Well, there was D-Day,” he retorted with a sneer.

“Billy, you are a dismal and depressing weener head,” Suzie responded with a toothy grin. And so ended their unlikely friendship.

# Other Comma Uses



- **Transition Words and Expressions:**

- Napoleon was exiled to Elba, however, he escaped and returned to France.

- **Tag Phrases Citing Sources:**

- The BP oil spill, according to the latest government reports, has finally been sealed.

- **Attributive Tags Identifying Speakers:**

- “If you keep making that face,” my mother told me, “it is going to stick that way.”

# Where to put the comma(s)?



- On my last visit during dessert my dad who is an expert skier asked me if I wanted to try dogsled racing.



- On my last visit, during dessert, my dad, who is an expert skier, asked me if I wanted to try dogsled racing.

# Where to put the comma(s)?



- “I’ve wanted to try dogsledding for years” Dad said “but we’ve never had the equipment or the dogs. Now however my friend Jim the new Allstate agent has just bought a team and wants to give it a try.”



- “I’ve wanted to try dogsledding for years,” Dad said, “but we’ve never had the equipment or the dogs. Now, however, my friend Jim, the new Allstate agent, has just bought a team and wants to give it a try.”