

# Calling All Commas!

By

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# Table of Contents

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Be Calm about Commas .....	2
Commas in a Series.....	3
Commas after Introductory Elements .....	4
Commas in Compound Sentences .....	5
Commas in Complex Sentences.....	6
Commas to Set Off Non-Restrictive Elements .....	7
Commas in Quotations.....	8
Commas in Dates, Addresses, Titles, and Numbers .....	9
Commas in Transitions, Direct Address, and Tag Questions .....	12
Comma Quiz .....	15
Appendix 1.....	17
Appendix 2.....	18

# Be Calm about Commas

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After a long phrase or a longer clause

When reading aloud, we may need a pause--

Call for a comma, hang it there on the line.

Take a breath, then go on; you're doing just fine.

Commas separate words--in a list, they're real handy;

When joining two clauses with “and,” they're just dandy.

Parenthetical thoughts or just ease in reading?

The friendly comma is what you'll be needing.

# Commas in a Series

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One of the simplest and most common uses of a comma is to separate the items in a series (list).

## **The Pattern:**

**a, b, and c**

Notice that there is a comma before the coordinate conjunction. If there are more than three elements in the series, the last element is preceded by a comma and the conjunction.

## **Sample Sentences:**

1. I had toast, cereal, and tea for breakfast.
2. Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver are places we want to visit.
3. He enjoys swimming, golfing, and running.
4. My friends called on me, took me out, and bought me dinner on my birthday.
5. The primary colours are red, yellow, and blue.

## **Think and Do:**

On a separate piece of paper, write five sentences using commas to separate the elements in a series.

# Commas after Introductory Elements

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An introductory element is a part of a sentence that introduces (begins) the sentence. Introductory elements come before the subject and verb of the main clause. There are many kinds of introductory elements: dates, transitions, adverbs, adverbial phrases that modify the whole sentence, gerund phrases.

## **The Pattern:**

**Introductory Element, ~ ~ ~ ~ ~.**

## **Sample Sentences:**

1. In 1969, American astronaut Neil Armstrong walked on the moon.
2. On Nov. 21, we'll go curling.
3. Yesterday, we were waiting at the corner for Jason.
4. On Thursday, we won't be in class all day!
5. Finally, we decided not to wait any longer but to go on without him.
6. However, some of my classmates were disappointed that he wouldn't be joining us.
7. Happily, he caught up to us later at the restaurant.
8. In spite of his bad mood, he ended up enjoying the evening.
9. Running for the bus, he slipped and fell.
10. Using the felt marker, he made a Welcome sign for the classroom door.

## **Think and Do:**

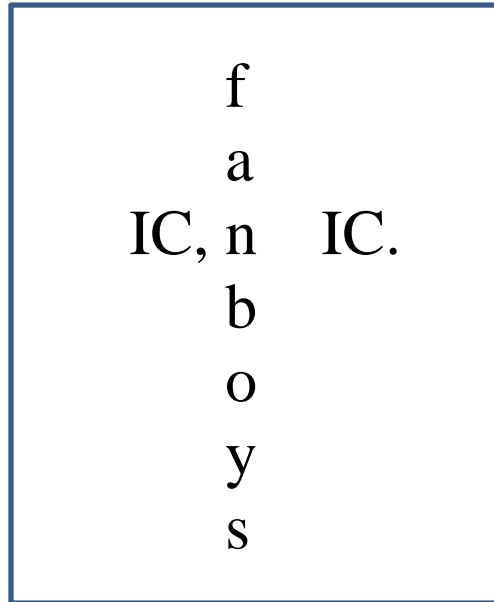
On a separate piece of paper, write five sentences using five different kinds of introductory elements.

# Commas in Compound Sentences

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A compound sentence consists of two independent clauses. They are joined by and comma and one of the FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

## The Pattern:



## Sample Sentences:

It was raining, so we cancelled the picnic.

Some of the students could meet us at 3 p.m., but some were busy.

I waved my hand, and I called out to my friends.

He said he was fine, yet he seemed a bit nervous.

We could go skiing, or we could choose snowboarding.

I haven't seen her today, nor do I expect to.

My e-mail never reached her, for she had changed her e-mail address.

## Think and Do:

Choose ten compound sentences from the novel you are reading. Copy them carefully on a separate piece of paper.

# Commas in Complex Sentences

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A complex sentence is made up of two clauses: a dependent clause (DC) and an independent clause (IC). A complex sentence can be arranged with either clause at the beginning. If the dependent clause is first, use a comma to separate it from the independent. If the independent clause comes first, no comma is necessary.

Dependent clauses begin with a subordinating conjunction. In the sample sentences below, the subordinating conjunctions are underlined. See Appendix 1 for a list of common subordinating conjunctions.

## The Pattern:



**DC, IC.**  
**IC DC.**

## Sample Sentences:

After we went home, we ate supper.

While we were eating, the phone rang.

Even though we were all sitting at the table, no one jumped up to answer the phone.

Because no one answered, we didn't hear the news till the following morning.

Our friends told us the news although we didn't ask them about what had happened.

They were anxious to include us in the discussion if we wanted to take part.

## Think and Do:

Using the list of subordinating conjunctions in the Appendix, write six sentences, three with each pattern. Pick conjunctions not used in the sample sentences.

# Commas to Set Off Non-Restrictive Elements

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A non-restrictive element (NRE) adds some additional information to a sentence, but that information is not necessary to identify the item to which the non-restrictive element refers. The identification is made from other information in the sentence.

## The Pattern:

~ ~ ~, **NRE**, ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~.  
~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~, **NRE**.

## Sample Sentences:

1. Michael Temple, my teacher, is tall and handsome.

The non-restrictive element, “my teacher,” is “not necessary” to know who is tall and handsome because we have another way to identify the tall and handsome person; we know his name! Whether Michael is your teacher or not, he is still tall and handsome!) “My teacher” adds extra information about Michael.

2. My mother, Louise, was a very kind person.
3. The desks, which had been neatly arranged at 9 a.m., were now stacked against the wall.
4. We rode in PokHou’s car, a Toyota.
5. We rode in PokHou’s car, which is a Toyota.
6. His cell phone, an iPhone iOS7, rang constantly while we were at lunch.

## Think and Do:

On a separate piece of paper, write four sentences, using both patterns for non-restrictive elements.

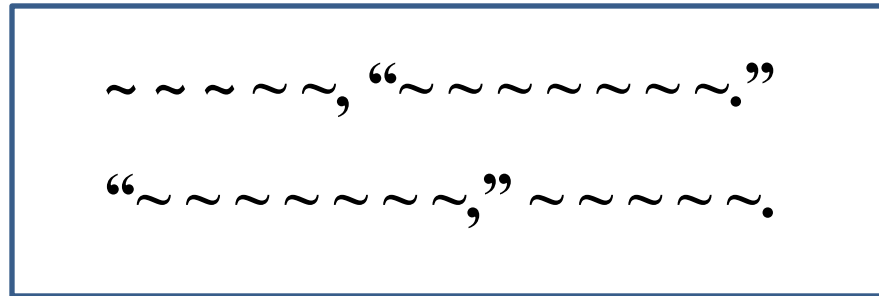


# Commas in Quotations

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When we identify the speaker of a quotation by using a tag line (he said, she said, etc.), a comma is used to separate the tag line from the quotation.

## The Pattern:



Note where the punctuation is placed. If the quote is at the end of the sentence, the period (or other sentence-ending punctuation) goes inside the quotation marks. If the quote is placed at the beginning of the sentence, the comma goes inside the quotation marks. Always use double quotation marks except for a quote within a quote.

## Sample Sentences:

Jason smiled and said, “Don’t forget to keep in touch!”

She screamed, “Look out!”

“No,” Hiroshi answered.

“I thought I heard her say, ‘I’m leaving early today,’” said Naroo.

## Think and Do:

Find some samples of dialogue that uses tag lines in a novel or short story or news story. Copy three sentences on a separate piece of paper.

# Commas in Dates, Addresses, Titles, and Numbers

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## DATES

### The Pattern:

**Month Date, Year**  
**Day, Month Date, Year**

I arrived in Fort St. John on Aug. 27, 2013.

On Thursday, Nov. 21, 2013, we will go curling.

## ADDRESSES

### The Pattern (in a sentence):

**Street Address, City, Province, Country**  
**City, Country**  
**~ ~ ~ ~ ~ City, Province, ~ ~ ~ ~ ~.**

I live at 9820 – 120 Avenue, Fort St. John, BC. My brother, on the other hand, lives in Tokyo, Japan.

Please send the equipment to our Grande Prairie, Alberta, office.

**The Pattern (in a letter, on an envelope):**

**Street Address  
City, Province  
Postal Code  
Country**

**Street Address  
City, Province Postal Code  
Country**

If you are sending a letter within Canada, it is not necessary to write the country name. If you are sending a letter from Canada to another country, write the name of the country as the last line on the envelope or on the inside address of the letter.

**Sample Sentences:**

November 18, 2013

8812 – 91 Street  
Fort St. John, BC V1J 6B1

Student Services  
Northern Lights College  
9820 – 120 Avenue  
Fort St. John, BC V1J 6K1

Dear Ms. Mallia:

I am interested in finding out about the Education Assistant program at Northern Lights College. I have finished grade 12, and I have always wanted to work with children. I would like to explore this career path. Please send the information to me at the above address.

I look forward to hearing from you. If I have any questions after reading the material you send, I will contact you again.

Sincerely,

Jenna Sin

## NUMBERS

Numbers are separated by commas after three places from the right, six places, nine places. Numbers that are larger than this are often written with a word, for example, million, billion, or trillion. Numbers that express years or telephone numbers do not have commas: for example, 1215, 1931, 2011, 2013; 785-6981.

### The Pattern:

**X,XXX**  
**XXX,XXX**  
**X,XXX,XXX**  
**XX,XXX,XXX,XXX**

### Samples:

There are about 37,000,000 people in Canada.

The population of New York City is more than 10 million.

His new flat-screen television cost \$2,333.33.

Edmonton has more than 900,000 people, maybe closer to a million.

### Think and Do:

Write a short letter to the Pomeroy Sports Centre asking if you can bring a group of students to the ice rink to skate on Thursday afternoon, Nov. 28, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Ask how much it will cost per student. The person in charge is Sylvia Wiebe.



# Commas with Transitions, Direct Address, and Tag Questions

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## TRANSITIONS

Transitions help us connect one sentence, idea, or paragraph to another. For a list of common transitions, see Appendix 2.

### The Pattern:

~ ~ ~ ~ ~. **Transition,** ~ ~ ~ ~ ~.  
[independent clause]  
~ ~ ~ ~ ~; **transition,** ~ ~ ~ ~ ~.  
[independent clause]  
~ ~ ~ ~ ~, **transition,** ~ ~ ~ ~ ~.  
[relative clause]

### Sample Sentences:

I really like living in Fort St. John. However, the winters are very cold.

The weather in Vancouver is very rainy; in addition, there is lots of fog.

I know, however, that the North Peace has many sunny days in the winter even though it's cold.

Sunny days make me feel cheery; in fact, I often whistle a tune.

## DIRECT ADDRESS

We use direct address (DA) when we talk directly to someone and say the name, the title, or the title and the name. A comma separates the term of direct address from the rest of the sentence. The direct address can come at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the sentence. Note the placement of the commas.

### The Pattern:

**DA, ~ ~ ~ ~ ~.**  
**~ ~ ~ ~ ~, DA, ~ ~ ~ ~ ~.**  
**~ ~ ~ ~ ~, DA.**

### Sample Sentences:

Mom, there's a telephone call for you.

Mr. Prime Minister, will you please sign these papers.

I'm so glad to see you, Uncle Bill!

I'd be happy, Ali, to help you with your project.

Certainly, Mr. President, we can do that.

### TAG QUESTIONS

Tag questions turn a statement into a question by adding a confirming question to the end of a statement. Tag questions can be affirmative or negative. They are preceded by a comma.

### The Pattern:

**~ ~ [affirmative verb] ~ ~ ~ ~ ~, [negative verb + pronoun] ?**  
**~ ~ [negative verb] ~ ~ ~ ~ ~, [affirmative verb] ?**

**Sample Sentences:**

They shoot horses, don't they?

Jim goes to the office every Saturday, doesn't he?

They don't like to go to the movies at the theatre, do they?

I'm not supposed to be there, am I?

She doesn't want to go, does she?

She wants to go, doesn't she?

**Think and Do:**

Find several examples of tag questions in a novel or article that you are reading. Copy the sentences carefully on a separate piece of paper.

# Comma Quiz

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## Part A

All but two of the following sentences contain comma errors. Mark “C” on the line under the correct sentences. Tell what type of comma has been used correctly. Correct the sentences that are wrong, and identify the type of comma (for example, compound sentence).

1. You’re going with us aren’t you?

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

2. I often use my telescope to look at the stars, and the planets.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

3. While on vacation, I visited Toronto, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Generally speaking the students did very well on the test.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Uncle Tom wants to go to Edmonton this weekend, but he has to work.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Uncle Tom do you want to go to Edmonton this weekend?

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

7. I have lived in Montreal, Toronto and Fort St. John.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_



8. The survey was sent out to 1562 people, but only 865 people answered.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

9. She wanted to visit Greece so she got a second job and saved her money for a whole year.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

10. The short story was written by Margaret Atwood a famous Canadian author.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

11. In 2009 I visited the Great Wall of China.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

12. While I was waiting for him my phone rang.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

13. There were only a few tickets left, however, I managed to get one.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

14. The concert will take place on Saturday, January 11, 2014.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

15. "Please sit down." she said.

---

Comma rule: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix 1: Subordinating Conjunctions

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before

after

while

even though

although

in spite of

because

if

## Appendix 2: Common Transitions

---

first

second

third

next

then

finally

after a while

a while later

meanwhile

however

nevertheless

moreover

in addition

beyond that

additionally

in contrast

however