

Comma Rules

1. **Elements in a series.** Snap, Crackle, and Pop. Come in, sit down, and hang on.
2. **To connect two independent clauses.** Stephanie's mother is brilliant, **but** she's a terrible cook. Never *after* a coordinating conjunction. The coordinating conjunctions: and, or, but, nor, for, yet, so.
3. **To set off introductory elements.** Running to 3rd base, he quickly realized he looked stupid. If you play with the pigs, you'll get dirty.
4. To set off **parenthetical elements**, e.g. parts that can be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence. "The Founders Bridge, *which spans the Connecticut River*, is falling down.." My niece, who studied accounting, lives at home. My nephew who studied heating lives at home. (I have one niece, but I have many nephews.)
5. Set off **phrases that express contrast.** I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
6. **To set off quoted elements.** She said, "Welcome home."
7. **To avoid confusion.** For most the year is already finished.
8. **Never use only one comma between a subject and its verb.** "Believing in oneself is essential for success." (Readers might pause after "oneself," but there is no reason to put a comma there.)
9. **Typographical Reasons:**
 - a. Between a city and a state [Hartford, Connecticut],
 - b. a date and the year [June 15, 1997],
 - c. a name and a title when the title comes after the name [Bob Downey, Professor of English],
 - d. in long numbers [5,456,783 and 14,682], etc.
 - e. Although you often see a comma between a name and suffix - Bob Downey, Jr., Richard Harrison, III - this comma is no longer regarded as necessary.
10. **Use Commas With Caution.** Remember that a pause in reading is not always a reliable reason for a comma. **Try not to use a comma unless you can apply a specific rule to do so.**

Good rule of thumb: If the main sentence makes complete sense without an element (a word or phrase), then set off that element by commas.

Condensed Rules

1. a series (snap, crackle, and pop). I use this rule whether it's a series of nouns or modifiers.
2. between two independent clauses. (You know a lot, but you lack confidence.)
3. before an introductory element. (When I was young, I didn't like cheese.)
4. to set off paranthetical info, usually an unnecessary dependent clause or an appositive. (My sister, the accountant, lives in Philadelphia.
5. contrast. (The puppies were cute, but very messy.)
6. with quotes. She asked, "Who lives in that house?"
7. to avoid confusion.