

# Comma Guide

A quick look at when, where, and how to use the comma

## When and where to use the comma

- To separate a coordinating conjunction before an independent clause
  - The squirrel was small, *but* ran quickly.
- To separate the *independent* and **dependent** clauses in a sentence
  - *The dog chased after the squirrel, **which was much faster than the dog.***
- To separate introductory words, a phrase, or clause
  - *More than twenty years ago*, hyper-color t-shirts were the latest fad.
  - *Yesterday*, he wore his hyper-color t-shirt.
- To separate items in a list or series
  - The owner wore *gloves, a hat, and a hyper-color t-shirt.*
- Between adjectives that can be reversed and/or connected with “and”
  - The *quick, fuzzy* squirrel was very distracting.
  - The *fuzzy, quick* squirrel was very distracting.
- To set off appositive phrases or extra information
  - The owner, *a man who wore a hyper-color t-shirt*, could throw the stick far.
- To separate a *verb* from a **quoted statement**
  - The owner *yelled*, **“Fetch!”**
  - **“To my dog,”** the owner *said*, **“the squirrel is extremely distracting.”**
- To set off transition words
  - The dog, *however*, was still running after the squirrel.

## What to look for when placing a comma

- *Independent Clause*: a clause that can function on its own as a complete sentence
  - *The squirrel was small*, but ran quickly.
- *Dependent Clause*: a clause that cannot stand on its own as a complete sentence and needs to be attached to an independent clause
  - The dog chased the squirrel, *which was much faster than the dog.*
- *Appositive Phrase*: a phrase occurring next to a noun used to describe it
  - The dog, *a yellow lab*, ran to get his stick.
- *Coordinating Conjunctions*: words that connect sentence elements that are parallel in structure. Coordinating conjunctions are *and, but, or, nor, so, for, and yet.*
  - The dog, a yellow lab, ran to get his stick, *but* was distracted.

## Dates

- Use to separate month/day/year
  - On June 12, 2009, I played with my dog.
- Not necessary when only month/year or month/year order
  - On 12 June 2009 I played with my dog.
  - In June 2009 I played with my dog.

## Locations

- Use to separate appositive in location names
  - Chicken, Alaska, is a very small town.
- Use to separate phrases in an address
  - Please send money to The Hat Factory, 411, East Main St., Chicken, Alaska, 7927.
- Not necessary with directional words
  - Northern Alaska has many small towns.

## Where not to use the comma

- Do not use after “such as” or “although”
  - Dogs *such as* the yellow lab are easily distracted.
- Do not use to separate a phrase that provides essential information.
  - His essay “*Fads from the 80s*” is about hyper-color t-shirts.
- Do not use to separate a *verb* from its **subject**
  - The **dog** *chased* his stick.
- Do not use between two independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction
  - He threw; the dog ran. (a period or semicolon must be used here.)
- Do not use between an independent clause and its dependent clause when introduced by after, because, if, since, that, unless, until, or when
  - The dog was distracted *when* it saw the squirrel.
  - The owner believed *that* his hyper-color t-shirt was still a fad.

## Works Cited

- Lunsford, Andrea A. *The Everyday Writer*. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2012. Print.
- Bullock, Richard. *The Northern Field Guide to Writing*. Second Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010. HB-57-HB-63. Print.