



Using Commas

There are a few basic comma rules that are normally observed in standard American English.

1. Commas set off introductory words, phrases, or clauses

Example: Because I ate too much at dinner, I felt sick for hours afterward.

Example: Slowly and silently, the Starship Enterprise moved into the repair dock.

Example: Unfortunately, we lost all our money playing slots.

2. Commas separate complete sentences joined by a coordinating conjunction: and, but, or, so, yet.

Example: We went to Disneyland, but the lines were so long that we didn't go on any rides.

Example: The football was perfectly thrown, and Rice made a clean catch in the end zone.

3. Commas set off "interruptive" material when the material is *not* essential to the meaning of the sentence. Use a comma before and after the phrase.

Example: I watched in horror as my friend, who had formerly been as quiet and peaceful as a dove, turned into a snarling werewolf.

Example: The peace treaty, a lost cause if ever there was one, became itself a casualty of the war.

Note that "interruptive" material that is essential to the meaning of the sentence (i.e., restrictive) does not take commas.

Example: The house that stood on the corner was the one that exploded.

4. Commas are used to separate three or more items in a series: words, clauses, even whole sentences.

Example: "Liberty, equality, fraternity" was the rallying cry of the French Revolution.

Example: The cross-country runners raced over the railroad track, across the meadow, and into the trees.

Example: John was out of Mary's life, the apartment was vacated, the car was paid up, and life just seemed like it was getting better and better.