

**Comma Usage I**

These tips explain where and when commas should be used in your writing.

**1. Joining Independent Clauses**

An independent clause is a clause, “a sequence of words containing a subject and a predicate,” that can stand alone as a complete sentence. When two independent clauses are joined with a coordinating conjunction, a comma must be used before the coordinating conjunction.

To easily remember the seven coordinating conjunctions think of them as FANBOYS:

	<b>F</b> or	
	<b>A</b> nd	
	<b>N</b> or	
Independent Clause	<b>B</b> ut	Independent Clause.
,	<b>O</b> r	
	<b>Y</b> et	
	<b>S</b> o	

Examples: I was anxious to know my grades, yet I was afraid of failing.  
The day started out sunny and pleasant, but the weather quickly changed.

**2. Subordinating Conjunctions**

Subordinating conjunctions begin a subordinate clause, which has a subject and a verb. Some common subordinating conjunctions are *after, before, while, when, since, because, although, as, and if*. If a subordinate clause precedes an independent clause, place a comma after the **subordinate clause**, not after the **subordinating conjunction**.

Examples: **While** I cleaned out my locker, I thought of the journey ahead of me after high school.  
I thought of the journey ahead of me after high school **while** I cleaned out my locker.

**3. Making a List**

Commas should separate lists of three or more items.

Examples: I want to start my career, buy a home, and begin my family.  
College prepares you for life, work, and family.

#### 4. Using Multiple Adjectives

Two rules apply when you are using more than one adjective to describe a noun:

**RULE 1** If the word “and” can be placed between the adjectives, a comma is needed.

Example: Mr. Hyde is such a dirty *and* dastardly villain.  
Mr. Hyde is such a dirty, dastardly villain.

**RULE 2** If the order of the adjectives can be reversed and still make sense, a comma is needed.

Examples: The beautiful, expensive class ring is a symbol of your hard work.  
(Notice that we could say “beautiful and expensive class ring” or “expensive, beautiful class ring.”)  
I dream of marching towards a diploma in a crisp, soft gown.  
(Notice that we could say “crisp and soft gown” or “soft, crisp gown.”)

#### 5. Using Quotes

Commas must be used to set off the person or publication being quoted.

Examples: The speaker asked, “Will those receiving their Bachelor’s in Education degree please rise?”  
“Teaching will be my love,” she said, “once I step into the classroom.”  
“Enrollment has increased by a considerable amount,” stated the Registrars’ annual report.

#### 6. Writing Dates and Addresses

Commas MUST be used to separate items in a date and address or to separate the date and address from the rest of the sentence.

Examples: I graduated from Texas A&M International University in Laredo, Texas, in December.  
I expect to be teaching at a college by August 21, 2006, in the new academic year.