

COMMAS (basic rules)

1. Compound Sentences

Place a comma before coordinating conjunctions in a compound sentence (when the subject changes after the conjunction).

Coordinating conjunctions are: **for, and, nor, but, or, yet** and **so**. Use the mnemonic device **FANBOYS** to remember which words are coordinating conjunctions.

Students at this campus work really hard, so they deserve a great job when they graduate.

2. Introductory Elements

Place a comma after introductory words or phrases in a sentence, including transition words or connectors.

In the future, we must consider cheaper solutions.

As a result, we all did well on the exam.

3. Interrupters

Put a comma around "interrupters" (parenthetical information, appositives) and non-essential relative clauses.

The gasoline prices have increased rapidly in the past three years, as can be seen from table 1.

Nokia, the Finnish cell phone maker, is struggling to break through in the US cell phone market.

Nokia, which is a Finnish cell phone maker, is struggling to break through in the US cell phone market.

4. Items in a Series

Use a comma to set off items in a series. The comma before 'and' is optional in a list.

I bought books, notebooks, and pens for this semester.

5. Always use a comma before the main clause.

If you enter the factory, you are required to wear a hard hat.

Although there are dozens of green house gases, a handful of dominant ones have attracted the most attention.

Note: Commas are not usually used after the main clause

You are required to wear a hard hat if you enter the factory.

Exception: Some use commas with contrastive and causative subordinators after the main clause, so in other words it is optional. Especially **while, since, as** are used with commas to distinguish them from their other meanings of time.

Many students and professors are excited about the possibilities that the new Aalto University may bring forth, while others remain skeptical.

6. Use a comma to separate two or more equivalent adjectives

Similarly to many other initially exotic, expensive technologies, CD-Recordable drives have become everyday tools for most users.

Note: not all adjectives are equivalent. 'Exotic' and 'expensive' can be combined with 'and', a comma and their order can be switched. "Modern electronic devices" is an example where the adjectives cannot be separated with 'and', a comma nor can their order be changed.

7. Use a comma before resultative -ing clauses

Any significant green house warming could cause a rapid melting of polar ice, resulting in a rise in sea level.

Design is often interdisciplinary, thus bringing concepts from the arts, mathematics and sciences.

SEMICOLONS

1. Use a semicolon (;) to join two independent clauses that are closely related in meaning.

I knew I wanted to work in the marketing field; I ended up accepting a job as the Director of Advertising.

2. Use a semicolon to separate items in a series when the items themselves already have internal punctuation within the item.

During my free time, I like to travel; spend time with my brothers, sisters and cousins; and eat out frequently at all kinds of restaurants.

3. Use a semicolon before transitional connectors (however, moreover, etc.), when they connect two independent clauses.

I really should exercise more; however, I feel that I really don't have time for exercise right now.

COLONS

1. Use a colon (:) after an independent clause to introduce a list

The lab report consist of six sections: introduction, background, engineering theory, experimental set up, procedure and analysis.

2. Use a colon to introduce direct quotations from another source.

E-commerce is changing the way business is done in a multitude of ways: "There are an increasing number of companies selling to consumers directly through the internet. In addition, the internet has enabled companies to come into contact with suppliers from all over the world....."(Nickels, 67)

3. Use a colon to introduce an example or an explanation related to something just mentioned.

College graduates nowadays have a wide range of employable skills: they are computer savvy and know at least one other language besides their own.