

Commas, Semicolons, and Colons

When and how to use commas:

- ❖ Commas indicate **direct quoted speech**:

He said, "Let's go," and we did.

He said we should go, and we did.

- ❖ Commas go inside **quotation marks**:

He had heard about "oleo," but he didn't know what it was.

- ❖ Commas set off **transitional phrases**:

On the other hand, many diets decrease stamina and strength.

As a matter of fact, American football was derived from rugby.

Many people, however, are allergic to cats.

- ❖ Use commas for **direct address, tag questions, mild interjections, and yes/no**:

I hate to say this, John, but this relationship just isn't working out.

You like chocolate, don't you?

Well, I might have time for lunch with you next week.

Yes, you must do the homework.

- ❖ Commas come before **coordinating conjunctions** (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) when they link two independent clauses:

It was raining, and I was hurrying to get home.

She felt terrible, but she went to class anyway.

- ❖ Commas follow **introductory adverb clauses and introductory phrases**:

On the way home, I stopped to buy groceries.

Because it was raining, I took a taxi home.

To our surprise, they were brothers.

- ❖ Commas separate **items in a series**, including **coordinate adjectives**:

He bought bananas, apples, oranges, and cheese.

She had long, dark, straight, thick hair.

- ❖ Commas set off **nonrestrictive adjective clauses and other parenthetical elements**:

My parents, who met each other in 1932, have been married for 50 years.

Hikers need sturdy shoes, which may be expensive.

When not to use commas:

- ❖ Do not separate **dependent clauses** (incomplete sentences):

Incorrect: Joe and Jill, went to the store.

Correct: Joe and Jill went to the store.

- ❖ Do not separate **two elements**:

Incorrect: I went home, and went to bed.

Correct: I went home and went to bed.

- ❖ Do not separate **cumulative adjectives** (Try inserting the word "and" or reversing the positions of the adjectives. If the sentence is confusing, do not use a comma):

Incorrect: I bought two, more apples.

Correct: I bought two more apples.

When and how to use semicolons:

❖ Semicolons connect **two independent clauses** (complete sentences) that are closely related:

The book is informative; it has helpful charts and graphs.

My brother is going to Spain for the summer; he will be studying Spanish.

❖ Semicolons separate three or more **items in a series** that already have commas in them:

I like big, purple shirts; red, high-heeled shoes; and fluffy, yellow pillows.

I live with Larry, a student; Moe, an executive; a