

Commas

Commas are typically used with dependent clause and phrase structures. When in doubt, it often helps to read your paper out loud, slowly. The places where you would pause or take a breath may indicate the need for a comma or other punctuation. If you need something more concrete, here are some rules to help guide you in your comma use:

1. **Commas should appear between dependent and independent clauses.** (Remember, an independent clause has a subject and a verb, while a dependent clause is usually missing one of these, or may have a word or phrase that indicates it is dependent on other information.)
 - a. Do NOT use commas between independent clauses, like this example: *Jake won the race, he was the fastest kid in the class.* This example should have a period or semicolon instead of a comma.
 - b. DO use commas when adding a thought/action into the middle of the main clause, like this example: *Jake, having won the race, forced the other kids to admit he was the fastest in the class.*
2. **Commas are used with prepositional phrases.** A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and shows a relationship in time and/or space. (i.e. *at, in, on, around, over, after, about, across, during, with, for, from, to,* etc.)
 - a. Use commas when the prepositional phrase comes before the main part of the sentence. For example: *Around ten o'clock, Mary arrived at the party.*
 - i. To avoid running into this problem, it is possible to place the prepositional phrase at the end of the sentence, like this: *Mary arrived at the party around ten o'clock.*
3. **Commas are also used with introductory words and phrases.** (i.e. *however, therefore, contrary to this, because of...*, etc.)
 - a. Use commas after these words and phrases when they begin the sentence. For example: *Therefore, chocolate is the best flavor of ice cream.* (Note: this construction shows the relationship between ideas.)
 - b. Also use commas after these words and phrases when they appear in the middle of the sentence. For example: *Vanilla is lame, therefore chocolate is the best flavor of ice cream.*
 - i. Note: You could also break this last example into two separate sentences.
4. **Commas are used with words that indicate a sequence.** (i.e. *next, then, first, lastly,* etc.)
 - a. Use commas after these words and phrases when they begin the sentence. For example: *Next, we went to the beach.*
 - i. Again, you can avoid this by placing the sequence word at the end of the sentence, like this: *We went to the beach next.*
5. **Commas are used to rename people or things.**
 - a. Use commas when you give two names for something/someone in the same sentence. For example: *My cat, Pie, is really cute.* (Note: you could take out the second name and the sentence would still work. The commas indicate useful but nonessential information.)