



Proofreading for Commas

There are a few things to keep in mind as you proofread your paper and look for comma errors. In order to correct these errors, you must understand where commas are needed and where they are not necessary.

Cases where commas are needed:

1. In compound sentences

- a. Remember the acronym FANBOYS (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*). If you have a sentence with one of these words in it, look to see if there is an independent clause (complete sentence) both before and after it. If there is, then you will need a comma.
 - i. Bob wanted to buy a new car, but he didn't have enough money to make the purchase.
 - ii. The football team was off to a great start, and the coach was already looking forward to playoffs.



2. After an introductory word or phrase

- a. Skim over the first couple of words of each sentence. If they end in *-ing*, are an infinitive (*to+verb*), or if the first word is an introductory word such as *well, yes, moreover, however, therefore*, then you will need a comma after it.
 - i. Following the meeting, Sue talked to Jerry about setting a date for the conference.
 - ii. To make my grandmother's cookies, you must use the correct amount of brown sugar.
 - iii. However, the citizens did not vote to increase school taxes.

3. After dependent markers

- a. Skim over the first few words of each sentence. If the sentence begins with a "dependent marker," the sentence is going to need a comma. Dependent markers are words such as *while, because, if, when, after*.
 - i. While I was studying, I noticed the kitchen smelled like smoke.
 - ii. After we all showered, we went to a nice restaurant for dinner.
 - iii. Because my cousin's wedding was on a Friday, I had to leave work early to get to the church.
- b. One way to recognize when you have a "dependent marker" is to try to switch your sentence around. Place the words that come after your comma at the beginning of the sentence, and place the words at the beginning of the sentence at the end. If you are able to switch the sentence around and still make sense of it, chances are it includes a dependent marker.
 - i. I noticed the kitchen smelled like smoke while I was studying.
 - ii. We went to a nice restaurant for dinner after we all showered.
 - iii. I had to leave work early to get to the church because my cousin's wedding was on a Friday.

4. In a series

- a. Use commas to separate lists or to list things in a series
 - i. My mother went to the store to buy cheese, milk, bread, and eggs.
 - ii. The professor’s goals were to get her students to write more often, improve their grammar, thoroughly proofread their work, and hand in assignments on time.



Cases where commas are not necessary:

1. Commas Splices

- a. Check each sentence that has a comma in it by determining whether or not there is an independent clause (complete sentence) on either side of the comma. If there is an independent clause on each side of the comma, then you have what is called a “comma splice.” This just means that a comma is not a strong enough punctuation mark for that sentence.
- b. You can correct comma splices in the following ways:
 - i. Make the sentence into two separate sentences by replacing the comma with either a semi-colon or a period.
 - ii. Add a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) after the comma.
- c. Correcting comma splices:
 - i. **Comma splice** – My father got two speeding tickets last month, he always drives too fast.
 - ii. **Correction** – My father got two speeding tickets last month. He always drives too fast.
 - iii. **Comma splice** – I was exhausted last night, I went to bed early.
 - iv. **Correction** – I was exhausted last night, so I went to bed early.

2. Disruptive Commas

- a. Find the subject and the verb of each of your sentences. The subject and verb should not be separated by a comma.
 - i. **Disruption** – The flowers in the garden, are in full bloom.
 - ii. **Correction** – The flowers in the garden are in full bloom.

The following resource was consulted in the design of this handout:

“Proofreading for Commas.” *OWL: Online Writing Lab*. 2004. Purdue University.

<<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/grammar/commaproof.html>>.

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