

# Grammar Overview

## Commas: Use a comma in the following situations:

1. A series of three or more verbs, nouns, adjectives, or even sentences. The rule is one less comma for each item in the series: I eat, drink, and run.

With three verbs, use two commas (with four verbs, use three commas and so on), and ALWAYS before the conjunction (, and), even between series of sentences:

I ate my sandwich, I drank my pop, and I went home.

2. Between two sentences – with a conjunction (, and) (, or) (, so) (, nor) (, but) (, yet) (, for): I ate my sandwich, and I went home.

3. After a subordinate (or dependent) clause that begins a sentence: Since, Because, Although, Even though, Unless, After, While, When, Before, etc. plus a mini-sentence:

Because *I fell down*, I broke my nose.

4. After a prepositional phrase (a preposition plus a noun) with five or more words at the beginning of a sentence (up, on, in, before, after, over, below, etc. – prepositions are words that usually indicate the position or condition of a noun):

*At night in my home*, I sleep.

BUT NOTE THE FOLLOWING:

At home at night, I sleep. No commas with four words or fewer. Sentences beginning with such phrases as (For example) or (Consequently) are exceptions.

## Passive Voice: Avoid overuse of passive voice

In passive voice, the subject becomes the object:

The car is driven by me.

The campfire was lit by the hikers.

Put your sentences in **Active Voice**: In active voice, the subject takes action.

I drove the car.

The hikers lit the campfire.

Beginning sentences with This, That, There, and It is OK once in a while, but don't overuse this device.

For example: It is necessary that I go to town.

Instead: I need to go to town.

**Subordinate clause** – adverb plus verb clause—note the commas:

*Since teaching the whole class MLA style*, the instructor feels better.

*Before going to class*, the teacher had a drink of water.

But notice this usage: The teacher had a drink of water *before going to class*. No comma when the clause or phrase comes at the end of the sentence.

**Verb phrases:** “ing” form of verbs that modify a noun:

*Running on empty*, Jackson Brown’s car came to a stop.  
*Puking her guts out*, Jane blinked twice and passed out.

**Adjective clause: adjective or “-ed” forms of verb:**

*Angry over the F on her paper*, Thelma yelled at the teacher.  
Louise, *annoyed with her boyfriend*, dumped him.

Note: The last four examples would be misplaced modifiers if the phrases were put at the end. Always keep the modifier next to the referent.

**Noun phrase:** a noun (often accompanied by adjectives and prepositional phrases) modifying another noun.

*A firefighter in Chicago*, Jasmine often works double shifts.  
*Jeremiah, a car thief from Altamont*, was sent to jail for six years.

**Colon/semicolon**

( ; ) = ( , and ) and is used the same way between two complete sentences that are connected:

Maria loves Juan; she is marrying him in June.

DO NOT use semicolons like commas. A semicolon ends a complete sentence and then adds to or explains what has already been said:

Solana likes fruit: apples, pears, and peaches.

Do Not Write:

Solana likes fruit such as: apples, pears, and peaches.

Instead:

Solana likes fruit such as apples, pears, and peaches. **NO COLON.**

A colon may also be used to highlight an appositive – an equivalent, even a whole sentence that is repeated for emphasis:

Mark killed the mosquito: he swatted it with his boot.