Commas Made Simple

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Rule 1

Use a comma when a sentence begins with an extra idea (in **bold**):

> **Because my grandmother has a swimming pool,** I have always enjoyed swimming.

It's easy to tell the difference between an extra idea and a sentence. A sentence begins with a person, place, or thing.

Extra ideas don't begin with a person, place, or thing. Look for words like **if**, **when**, **because**, **although**, **in**, **by**, **for**, **with**, **to**, **of**.

If an extra idea appears at the back of the sentence, do not use a comma:

> I have always enjoyed swimming **because my grandmother has a swimming pool. NO COMMA**

Study these examples, noting which sentences have commas and which do not:

> **Although I enjoy swimming,** I never learned how to water-ski.
> I never learned how to water-ski **although I enjoy swimming**. **NO COMMA**
>
> **When I approached the house,** I saw an elderly man peering out the window.
>
> I saw an elderly man peering out the window **when I approached the house. NO COMMA**
>
> **For most students,** this rule is easy to learn.
> This rule is easy to learn **for most students**.

Rule 2

Only seven words can be used with a comma to join two sentences. These are the FANBOYS words: **For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So**.

Use a comma with a **FANBOYS** word when there's a sentence in front and in back. *And* and *but* are the most common FANBOYS words:

I enjoyed the movie**, and** I want to see it again. COMMA
I enjoyed the movie and want to see it again. NO COMMA

The storm raged**, but** it didn't spoil our fun. COMMA
The storm raged **but** didn't spoil our fun. NO COMMA

Don't try to use a non-FANBOYS word (**however, then, therefore**) to join two sentences with a comma. Use a period or a semicolon instead.

The storm raged, however it didn't spoil our fun. INCORRECT
The storm raged. However, it didn't spoil our fun. CORRECT
The storm raged; however, it didn't spoil our fun. CORRECT

We ate breakfast, then we washed the dishes. INCORRECT
We ate breakfast. Then we washed the dishes. CORRECT
We ate breakfast; then we washed the dishes. CORRECT

Rule 3

Use two commas with an interrupter (in **bold**). One comma takes your voice down, and the second comma brings it back up. Read the sentences aloud, and you'll hear the change:

Bart Simpson**, who often makes rude remarks to his parents,** is not a good role model for children. CORRECT
Superman**, disguised as Clark Kent,** fights a never-ending battle for the American way. CORRECT

Reminders:

- Never use a comma directly after **because, and, but**, and similar words. Study the examples to see where commas are placed.
- Don't use a comma to join two sentences. Use a period or semicolon instead.
-The seven FANBOYS are the **only** words that can be used with a comma to join two sentences. Use periods with other words:

Bill washed his car, **then** he waxed it. INCORRECT
Bill washed his car. **Then** he waxed it. CORRECT
Bill washed his car; **then** he waxed it. CORRECT

The job I'm interested in pays well, **therefore** I expect a lot of competition. INCORRECT
The job I'm interested in pays well. **Therefore,** I expect a lot of competition. CORRECT
The job I'm interested in pays well; t**herefore,** I expect a lot of competition. CORRECT

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Pronouns Made Simple

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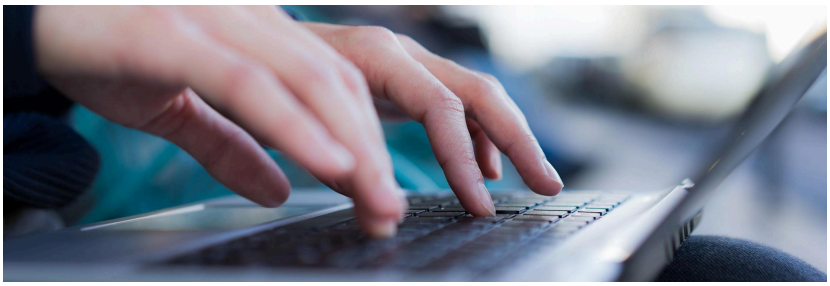
1. Use **its** (no apostrophe) as a possessive word (similar to **his**):

   The company hopes to increase **its** profits this year. √ [increase *his* profits]
   The coat is missing one of **its** buttons. √ [missing *his* buttons]

2. **It's** (with an apostrophe) *always* means **it is**:

   When that bell rings, **it's** time for class. √ [*it is* time]
   I'm going to buy Joe's computer if **it's** not too expensive. √ [if *it is* not too expensive]



3. It often helps to shorten a sentence when you're choosing a pronoun: **I/me, she/her, he/him, we/us, they/them**.

   Let **me** help you.
   Let Jane and **me** help you. √

   Yesterday **I** helped Greg.
   Yesterday Jane and **I** helped Greg. √

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Subjects and Verbs Made Simple

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1. When a sentence begins with *here* or there, reverse the sentence to get the verb right.

Here (is, are) your luggage.
Your luggage **is** here.
Here **is** your luggage. √

There (go, goes) my two best friends.
My two best friends **go** there.
There **go** my two best friends. √

Here (come, comes) the bride.
The bride **comes** here.
Here **comes** the bride. √

There (seem, seems) to be many possibilities.
Many possibilities **seem** to be there.
There **seem** to be many possibilities. √

2. Don't be fooled by numbers. A *unit* of time or measurement is always singular.

Twenty minutes **is** the average length of a doctor's appointment.
Twenty students **are** waiting impatiently for the bell to ring.

Two bananas **are** left in the bowl on the table.
Two days **is** barely enough time to catch up on my chores during the weekend.

Three yards of material **is** more than enough for this dress.
Three homes in our neighborhood **are** beautifully landscaped.

3. In *either/or*, *neither/nor* sentences, use the words near *or/nor* to choose your verb.

Neither my sisters **nor my mother likes** Chinese food.
Neither my mother **nor my sisters like** Chinese food.

Either John **or his parents take** Aunt Eleanor out to eat every weekend.
Either his parents **or John takes** Aunt Eleanor out to eat every weekend.

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