

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; **therefore**, 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**):

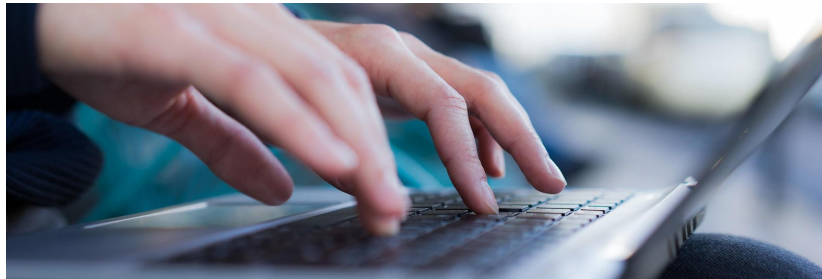
The company hopes to increase **its** profits this year. ✓ [increase *his* profits]

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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