

Introductory Words, Phrases, & Clauses

To increase the sophistication, variety, and detail of your writing, you can add [introductory words, phrases, and clauses](#) to the four types of sentences we have studied.

I. Introductory Words:

- Introductory words **are not necessary for meaning in the sentence**, though they can be meaningful for the relationship between two sentences. If this “extra” word is taken out, the essential meaning of the sentence is not lost.
- These “extras,” whether words, phrases, or clauses, **are set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma when they come at the beginning of the sentence**.
- Adverbs and interjections are common introductory words.
- **Introductory adverbs** need to be set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma, **unless** they are part of a part of a phrase, in which case the entire phrase gets a comma (examples below).
- **Common introductory adverbs** are **however, meanwhile, suddenly, finally, besides, and still**. These are often **used as transition words, to link one sentence to the next** (examples below).
- **Interjections** are often **used for emphasis** and are set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma. You can use an exclamation point if the emphasis is to a greater degree.
- **Common introductory interjections** include **please, thanks, yes, no, hallelujah, drat**, and even words that aren’t really words at all like **um, uh, achoo, ah, and oh**.

Introductory Adverb Examples:

1. ***However**, the rent was still past due.* (an adverb as an introductory word)
2. ***Meanwhile**, the soon-to-be ex-husband had hired a lawyer.*
3. ***Suddenly**, she was left with a stack of bills to pay and no way to pay them.*
4. ***However she juggled the bills**, the rent was still past due.* (There is no comma after “however” because “however” simply begins the phrase, “However she juggled the bills.”)
5. ***Suddenly poor**, she was still left with a stack of bills to pay besides the rent.*

Introductory Interjection Examples:

1. ***Ha**, that’ll be the day.*
2. ***Ouch**, that hurt.*
3. ***Yes**, I will, thanks.*
4. ***Well**, I wanted to go to the store.*

II. Introductory Phrases:

- An introductory phrase is **a group of words that comes before the main clause in a sentence**. It helps the reader understand more about the main clause.
- An introductory phrase is **not a complete clause**; it is **missing a subject, predicate, or both**. If it does have a subject and predicate, it’s called an introductory clause.
- There are many types of phrases. We will study a few.

- A) **Introductory prepositional phrase:** The prepositional phrase adds information to the main clause, often about a **location** or **timing**. Use a **comma** after the introductory prepositional phrase to set it apart from the rest of the sentence **if the phrase is four words or longer (some sources say three)**. The prepositional phrase begins with a preposition (a word showing time or place relationship: on, at, in, from, to, around, through, etc.) and ends with a noun (the object of the preposition). Prepositional phrases can

also go at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence. If you are not sure that a word is acting as a preposition, you need to look up the part of speech. Be careful, some words can act as different parts of speech in different sentences.

Introductory prepositional phrase examples:

1. *After the severe spring thunderstorm, the sky turned gold.*
2. *In the very beginning of the story, a boy meets a stray dog.* (When did the boy meet the dog? “In” the beginning).
3. *During the rainstorm, I got lost.* (When did I get lost? “During” the rainstorm.)

B) Introductory infinitive phrases: The infinitive phrase often **introduces how something is being done**. These phrases can also provide location and other helpful information. An infinitive phrase **begins with an infinitive (“to” plus a verb)**. It may also include a direct object of the verb. Infinitive phrases can go at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence.

Introductory Infinitive phrase examples:

1. *To get to the store, turn left at Oak Street.* (At which “location” will you arrive after turning left? You will arrive at the store.)
 2. *To write a great essay, start with a good outline.* (“How” do you write a great essay? Write a good outline.)
 3. *To run the program, hit the “Start” button.*
- Be sure not to confuse an infinitive, consisting of *to* plus a verb, with a prepositional phrase beginning with *to*, which consists of *to* plus a noun or pronoun and any modifiers.

C) Introductory appositive phrase: An appositive phrase offers **additional information about a noun (usually the subject) in the sentence**. You can use this as an introductory phrase, giving the reader more information about the subject of the sentence or another noun. If the phrase is a nice addition to the sentence but is not necessary for clarity, use a comma. However, **if the introductory appositive phrase is necessary to the sentence, do not use a comma**.

Introductory appositive phrase examples:

1. *An insightful reader, Aaron offered a fantastic interpretation of the text the class was studying.*
2. *A jaw-dropping display of light and sound, the fireworks amazed all who were lucky enough to see them.*
3. *My brother Ron will come with us.* (There is no comma before and after “Ron,” because I have two brothers, and the reader needs to know which brother is coming.)

III. Introductory Clauses:

- Dependent clauses (DC) are groups of words that **contain a subject and predicate** and **begin with a subordinating conjunction**.
- The DC is introductory if it comes before the main clause and introduces, or gives more information about, the main clause. No comma is needed if the DC comes after the main independent clause.

Introductory clause examples:

1. *Before Eric and Pranav got to school that day, the class prepared for the party.*
2. *Because they found a hundred dollar bill on the sidewalk, the sisters became rich in a day.*
3. *Although the athletes were tired from the long day of competing, they all decided to continue practicing into the evening.*