

## Commas: Items in a Series

A. K. Stone

**11f.** Use commas to separate items in a series.

**EXAMPLES** Items of folk art are often discovered in closets, attics, and barns. [words]  
Our exhibit has encouraged people who tell stories, who sew quilts, and who carve toys to share their talents. [clauses]

(1) If all items in a series are joined by *and*, *or*, or *nor*, do not use commas to separate them.

**EXAMPLE** Diamonds or flowers or stars are good designs for a beginner.

(2) Short independent clauses may be separated by commas.

**EXAMPLE** Plan your design, collect scraps, and seek good advice.

(3) Use commas to separate two or more adjectives preceding a noun.

**EXAMPLE** See the loud, bright colors in her design!

MECHANICS

**EXERCISE A** Insert commas where they belong in the following sentences.

**Example 1.** Please bring your rulers, calculators, and workbooks.

1. Do you use relish, mustard, and mayonnaise?
2. Uncle Hugo likes large, colorful flowers in his garden.
3. Rita plays the piano, writes songs, and sings in a choir.
4. She gave a concert at noon, signed autographs at three, and visited the museum at nine.
5. The council voted to buy a firetruck, to hire a police captain, and to build a water tower.
6. Miami, Orlando, and Tampa are three Florida cities.
7. Have you noticed that Tom cleans the house, cooks the meals, and washes the dishes?
8. Fabian made a nutritious salad with tuna, carrots, beans, and macaroni.
9. Are those the old, ragged clothes from the attic?
10. Men, women and children pay the same ticket price.

**EXERCISE B** Insert commas where they belong in the following paragraph.

**Example [1]** Old quilts, thick pottery, and wooden ware are examples of folk art.

[11] Needlework, quilts and toys are parts of the new, exciting exhibit. [12] Short, interesting biographies are also provided. [13] Elizabeth, a girl in the 1700s, studied music, spoke French, and did needlework. [14] Her name, her birthday, and her school's name are sewn into a sampler. [15] As she sewed, Elizabeth practiced the alphabet, learned to spell, made up verses, and showed her artistic ability.

## Commas with Independent Clauses

**11g.** Use a comma before *and*, *but*, *for*, *nor*, *or*, *so*, or *yet* when it joins independent clauses.

**EXAMPLES** Marina must pass the test, **or** she'll have to repeat the course.  
Somebody suggested a tutor, **but** she wanted to consult her teacher.

**EXERCISE A** Insert commas where they are needed in the sentences below.

**Example 1.** The play received a poor review, yet it was a success.

1. We have less leisure time, for we're busy with household chores.
2. Sonya carries out trash, and Lionel does laundry.
3. One day she left the door open, and the cat slipped out of the house.
4. We had no idea where to search, nor did we have the time.
5. Did you look in the shed, or did you check the neighbor's garage?
6. Jake followed the recipe, yet the spaghetti was too spicy.
7. Three of us ate it, but Lionel refused.
8. Jake's not a great cook, but we decided not to hurt his feelings.
9. Maybe Dad will take time off, or Grandma will agree to come.
10. How we appreciate Mom, and how we miss her!

**EXERCISE B** For each of the following sentences, add commas where necessary. If the sentence is already correct, write C on the line provided.

**Example** \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Roberto doesn't enjoy singing, nor does he enjoy dancing.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Joel understands French, but he doesn't write it well.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Kimberly will go with her family to Vermont, or she will attend summer camp.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Rebecca wanted to do well in her piano recital, so she practiced for an hour every day.
- C 14. Stephen or Karl will water the plants and feed the dog while we are away.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Solomon studies the Torah every night, for his bar mitzvah will take place next month.
- C 16. Pierre enjoys science fiction films, yet he doesn't like mysteries or thrillers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Teresa wants to be a biomedical engineer, so she is taking extra science classes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Will your class be working on the bulletin board, or will you be decorating the gym?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Kerri isn't in the math club, nor is she in the chess club.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Ryan and Bob joined the ensemble, and both boys will be playing the violin.

## Commas with Nonessential Clauses and Phrases

- 11h.** Use commas to set off nonessential subordinate clauses and nonessential participial phrases.

A *nonessential* (or *nonrestrictive*) clause or participial phrase adds information that is not necessary to the main idea in the sentence.

**EXAMPLES** Dr. Laker, who drives a yellow van, is his advisor. [nonessential clause]

My brother, hoping to get a job, requested an interview. [nonessential phrase]

When a clause or phrase is necessary to the meaning of a sentence—when it tells *which one(s)*—the clause or phrase is *essential* (or *restrictive*), and commas are not used.

**EXAMPLES** The girl who won third place is my teammate. [essential clause]

The jogger wearing the red shirt came in first! [essential phrase]

**EXERCISE A** Identify each underlined phrase or clause in the sentences below by writing above it *E* for *essential* or *NE* for *nonessential*. Insert commas where they are needed.

**Example 1.** The coconut, <sup>NE</sup> which is a remarkable gift of nature, grows on palm trees.

1. Would you like to meet some people <sup>E</sup> who pick coconuts for a living?
2. The climbers, <sup>NE</sup> all of whom wear loops around their ankles, look like acrobats.
3. Who is the climber <sup>E</sup> who just reached the top?
4. Isn't he the person <sup>E</sup> who gave us directions?
5. Dried coconut meat, <sup>NE</sup> which is called copra, is used for many products.
6. Coconut shells, <sup>NE</sup> once cleaned and polished, are carved into bowls, cups, or spoons.
7. I would like to have some cups <sup>E</sup> and bowls that are made from shells.
8. Have you seen any stands <sup>E</sup> that sell those items?
9. When my meeting is over, I plan to buy a few items <sup>E</sup> made from shells.
10. My family, <sup>NE</sup> who will meet me at the airport, will be pleased with the gifts.

**EXERCISE B** Add or delete commas as needed in the following sentences.

**Example 1.** Our drama teacher, whom we admire greatly, will be here soon.

11. Sri Lanka, which is a country in Southeast Asia, has coconut trees.
12. What happens to the coconut fibers that are ground up?
13. Made from the meat of the coconut, candles and soap are important byproducts.
14. One of the shirts that I bought, has buttons made from coconut shells.
15. This hat that I like, has been made from natural and dyed coconut fiber.

## Commas After Introductory Elements

**11i.** Use commas after certain introductory elements.

(1) Use a comma to set off a mild exclamation such as *well*, *oh*, or *why* at the beginning of a sentence. Other introductory words such as *yes* and *no* are also set off with commas.

**EXAMPLES** *No*, I'm not busy tonight.      *Well*, let's ask Su Ling to come along.

(2) Use a comma after an introductory participial phrase.

**EXAMPLE.** *Jogging along her usual path*, Eloise was caught by surprise.

(3) Use a comma after two or more introductory prepositional phrases or after a long one.

**EXAMPLE** *At the side of the road*, she came upon a furry creature.

(4) Use a comma after an introductory adverb clause.

**EXAMPLE** *Whenever I go to the bank*, I stop at my aunt's office.

**EXERCISE A** Add commas where necessary in the following sentences.

**Example 1.** Before we go to the park, let's have a snack.

- Lying on the ground, Roberto admired the clouds in the sky.
- In the corner of the room, Julie found her lost earring.
- Why, I have always appreciated a good joke!
- Even though Cynthia and Leslie were late, they didn't miss the beginning of the play.
- Toward the back of the closet, Nancy noticed a bright, shiny object.

**EXERCISE B** Underline the introductory element in each of the following sentences. Then, add commas where necessary.

**Example 1.** During the course of this project, we will see many interesting things.

- Yes, I know that Alexa Canady is a neurosurgeon.
- At the age of twenty-six, she became a neurosurgeon.
- Why, what an incredible accomplishment!
- In her junior year of college, she decided to become a doctor.
- Oh, when did she decide on her specialty?
- According to a recent interview, that incident happened a few years later.
- Planning her career, Dr. Canady was sure she wanted to work with children.
- Well, isn't the branch of medicine dealing with children called *pediatrics*?
- Yes, she is a pediatric neurosurgeon.
- After she set her goals, Alexa Canady was determined to succeed.

## Commas with Interrupters

**11j.** Use commas to set off elements that interrupt the sentence.

(1) Nonessential appositives and nonessential appositive phrases should be set off with commas.

**EXAMPLE** Dr. Okimo, the new P.T.A. president, asked parents to become active.

(2) Words used in direct address are set off by commas.

**EXAMPLE** Greta, please hang up your jacket.

(3) Parenthetical expressions (side remarks that add information or relate ideas) are set off by commas.

**EXAMPLE** Paulie, on the other hand, wanted to lead the parade.

**EXERCISE A** Add commas where they are needed in the following sentences.

**Example 1.** Your dinner, Alexandra, is getting cold.

1. The cheerleading squad, not the football players, will greet the visitors.
2. To tell the truth, we didn't expect them until next week.
3. Althea, will you introduce the speakers?
4. The new uniforms I believe, will be arriving soon.
5. Please take charge of the distribution, Eugene.
6. To be perfectly honest, I did not like that movie at all.
7. Do you think, Ted, that the package will arrive today?
8. The Blanchards, our new neighbors, have just built a deck.
9. Nevertheless, we still intend to go to the mountains this weekend.
10. I need to know by tomorrow whether you are coming to the concert, Judy.

**EXERCISE B** Underline the appositive phrases in the following sentences, and add commas where necessary.

**Example 1.** We looked forward to visiting Belgium, the next stop on our tour.

11. Belgium, a small country in Europe, has two official languages.
12. Dutch, a Germanic language, is spoken by those in the northern part of Belgium.
13. The people in the southern part the Walloons, speak French.
14. Some signs in Brussels, the capital city, are in both languages.
15. Many Belgians, adults and children, know more than one language.

## Comma Review A

- 11f.** Use commas to separate items in a series.
- 11g.** Use a comma before *and*, *but*, *for*, *nor*, *or*, *so*, or *yet* when it joins independent clauses.
- 11h.** Use commas to set off nonessential subordinate clauses and nonessential participial phrases.
- 11i.** Use commas after certain introductory elements.
- 11j.** Use commas to set off elements that interrupt the sentence.

**EXAMPLES** Our collection includes pop, mariachi, rhythm and blues, and hip-hop music.  
 Bill bathed the dog, and the cat hid under the bed.  
 Tim, hoping to make the swim team, practiced every day.  
 If you see smoke, you know there is a fire.  
 Harrison Ford, my favorite actor, stars in that new movie.

**EXERCISE A** Add commas where they are needed in the following sentences.

**Example 1.** We packed jackets, a tent, cooking gear, and our food.

- For our garden, Rob pulled weeds, Gabby planted vegetables, and I added mulch.
- The main agenda items, which are listed on the chalkboard, will be covered first.
- In case you were wondering, Christa will be reading the part of Juliet.
- Ports for a modem, video and sound cards, and a printer are found on most computers.
- Wow, our relay team is good, but would you look at the way they are running now!
- The weather for the final day of the golf tournament was breezy, mild, and beautiful.
- Should we distribute the ballots, or would you prefer that we wait a little longer?
- Gathering the bundles of magazines, Ben and I prepared to visit the nursing home.
- Neither the small, black, foreign sports car nor the oversized, blue van was ours.
- By the end of the year, our new company, Equipment Rentals, expects business to double.

**EXERCISE B** Add or delete commas as necessary in the following sentences.

**Example 1.** When Tom and Blanca, reached the top of the hill, they witnessed a beautiful sunset.

- Searching for a new house, packing our belongings, and cleaning the house took a lot of time.
- Our guide dogs, carefully trained over a period of several months, were ready to be placed.
- Those two cowboys, whose saddles look new, have worked at the ranch for many years.
- Over the cupboard, in the corner of the kitchen, you'll find the picnic basket.
- The students who were receiving awards, were told to come half an hour early.

## Comma Review B

- 11f.** Use commas to separate items in a series.
- 11g.** Use a comma before *and*, *but*, *for*, *nor*, *or*, *so*, or *yet* when it joins independent clauses.
- 11h.** Use commas to set off nonessential subordinate clauses and nonessential participial phrases.
- 11i.** Use commas after certain introductory elements.
- 11j.** Use commas to set off elements that interrupt the sentence.
- 11k.** Use commas in certain conventional situations.
- 11l.** Do not use unnecessary commas.

**EXERCISE A** Add commas where needed in the following sentences.

**Example 1.** Marco, who turns sixteen tomorrow, will soon get his driver's license.

1. Samuel will bring the food, and Laura and Michael will cook.
2. I just returned from the grocery store, the pharmacy, and the florist.
3. Keely and Tomas, who are coming from Houston, will join us for dinner tonight.
4. Tonight I will finish my book, make an outline for my report, and type it into the computer.
5. Carrie, reacting quickly, caught the falling plate before it broke.

**EXERCISE B** Add or delete commas as needed in the following sentences.

**Example 1.** The Smithsonian Institution is located in Washington, D.C.

6. This group of museums was named after James Smithson, an English scientist.
7. Smithson, who was a wealthy man, left his fortune to the United States of America.
8. The money was to be used for the increase, display, and diffusion of knowledge.
9. On June 27, 1829, Smithson died in Genoa, Italy.
10. Six years were to pass, however, before the U.S. government was notified of his will.
11. After a great deal of debate, Congress decided to accept the gift.
12. Most of Smithson's fortune, of course, was in England, not in the United States.
13. To use his gift, Congress had to find a way of turning English pounds into American dollars.
14. First, the money was put in the form of British gold coins.
15. These coins were shipped to the U.S. Mint at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and recoined.

## Review A: End Marks and Abbreviations

**EXERCISE** For each of the following sentences, add end marks where needed. Also, underline any errors in the use of abbreviations and write the correction above the error.

**Example 1.** Will <sup>Mr.</sup>Mister Benson be our teacher next year?

1. This organization's headquarters have been on this ave. for five years.
2. Please help Mrs Walsh with the dishes
3. Are you originally from Madison, Wisconsin
4. Rogelio Martinez, Junior, is my classmate.
5. Gen. Larson spoke briefly to the soldiers.
6. Ms Barbara Ayala teaches ballet at our school.
7. Have you met Dr Caldwell
8. We saw illustrations of structures built before 200 before Christ.
9. We visited the office of James Koenecke, Medical Doctor.
10. Have you read the biography of Gov. Long
11. The specifications indicate that the unit weighs eight lbs.
12. Would you like a tsp of sugar in your coffee, sir
13. J R Jackson will be the new mayor.
14. What a wonderful speech Sen. Brown gave
15. Have the members of the task force driven through S. Carolina
16. The poet who gave readings last week was Dennis Ellington, Senior.
17. Did you know that Dvori's family is from St. Louis, Missouri
18. The temple dated back to *anno Domini* 620.
19. Who were the earliest colonists to arrive in N. America
20. The film was shot in Portland, OR.