



Beginner Commas

This set of slides will illustrate the most common uses of one of the most common punctuation marks:

Use a comma to set off the elements of a series (three or more things), including the last two. You may have learned that this comma is not necessary. Sometimes, however, the last two items in your series will glom into one if you don't use the so-called **serial comma**.

My favorite uses of the Internet are sending e-mail, surfing the Web, and using chat rooms.

Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, yet, so) to separate two **independent clauses**.

The public seems eager for some kind of gun control legislation, but the congress is obviously too timid to enact any truly effective measures.

If the two independent clauses are brief and nicely balanced, this comma may be omitted, but the comma is always correct.

Our team is very good, but their team is better.

Use a comma to set off introductory elements.

Anxious about the upcoming winter, settlers began to bicker among themselves about supplies.

In the winter of 1644, nearly half the settlers died of starvation or exposure.

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Use a comma to separate **coordinate adjectives**.

Coaches grew weary of running practices in the drafty, dreary, dilapidated gymnasium.

The designs for an expensive, modern gym should make them happy.

If you could put a but or an and between the adjectives, you should put a comma between them.

Expensive and modern = expensive, modern But not “a little and old house.” “A little old house” would be correct.

Use a comma to set off elements that express a **contrast** or a **turn** in the sentence.

The house was cute, but too expensive for the newlyweds.

They were looking for something practical, not luxurious.

Use a comma to set off states and countries, years (in a full date), titles, etc.

The conference was originally set for Geneva, Switzerland, but was then rescheduled for Chicago, Illinois.

Their wedding date was set for August 5, 2000, in the college chapel in Newton, Massachusetts.

Tashonda Klondike, Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, submitted the committee’s final report.

Use a comma to set off **quoted language**.

Frost’s poem “Fire and Ice” begins with the lines, “Some say the world will end in fire, / Some say in ice.”

“Fire when ready, Gridley,” the Admiral said.

“We can’t see into the future,” said the President, “but we have to prepare for it nonetheless.