

LESSON 1 : COMMAS

AN OVERVIEW

KATIE MCKNIGHT, PH.D.

Overview and Tips for Classroom Implementation

Commas are tough to teach and tough to master. Even English teachers can occasionally misuse a comma. This lesson provides an overview of the basic rules for commas. I suggest that this lesson be used as an introduction or a quick review since it is comprehensive.

Step-by-Step Lesson Instructions

Step One Make copies of the “10 Quick Comma Rules” (see figure 3 on adjoining page) for the students. I suggest that the students paste a copy into their writing or class notebook. Using poster boards or large sheets of construction paper write each of the following quick comma rules. There are many more comma rules, but these ten rules are important for student writers to understand.

Each rule will be written on a separate poster board or sheet of construction paper:

- Use commas to separate items in a list or series (words, phrases, and clauses).
Example: *Colin enjoys **trains, cars, and Dr. Seuss.***
- Use a comma after the words “yes” or “no” when these are used to start a sentence.
Example: ***Yes,** I would like some dessert.*
- Use a comma before and after a consecutive introductory prepositional phrase.
Example: ***At the end of the day in Chicago,** people rush home from work.*
- Use a comma after an introductory participle or participial phrase.
Example: ***Inspired by the professor’s comments,** Ellie decided to go to law school.*
- Use a comma after an introductory adverb clause.
Example: ***Before we boarded the airplane,** we needed to pass through security.*
- Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives that are placed before a noun.
Example: *My Girl Scout troop is a **dedicated, kind** group.*
- Use a comma to separate independent clauses joined by the conjunctions for, and, nor, but, or, and yet.
Example: *Troop 320 wanted to go camping, **but** it was too cold to sleep in tents.*
- Use a comma to cue a word or words in direct address.
Example: ***Jim,** can you reach the top shelf?*
- Use a comma to cue a parenthetical expression like such as, I believe, and for example.
Example: *This, **I believe,** is the best way to solve the problem.*
- Use a comma at the beginning and end of an appositive phrase.
Example: *Susan, **my dear friend,** likes to kayak.*



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Step Two Divide the students into 10 groups. Assign each group a different comma rule.

Step Three Instruct the students to read the assigned comma rule and the example. Provide the following directions:

Provide additional examples that demonstrate your understanding of your assigned comma rule. This is a timed activity and will have 2 minutes to write your example on the poster board.

When time is called, you will pass your poster board to the next group. When your group receives the new comma rule, you will add a new example. This process will repeat until every group has written examples for each of the ten comma rules.

Step Four Once the students have written examples for each of the ten comma rules, the student groups should check for accuracy the examples for the rule that they were originally assigned.

Additional Tips

Give each group a different color marker so it is easier for you to keep track of which examples belong to which student group. You may have to vary time depending on how the students are working on the examples.



FIGURE 3

TEN QUICK COMMA RULES

(There are more comma rules but here are ten important ones for writers.)

Use commas to separate items in a list or series (words, phrases, and clauses).

Example: Colin enjoys *trains, cars, and Dr. Seuss.*

Use a comma after the words “yes” or “no” when these are used to start a sentence.

Example: Yes, I would like some dessert.

Use a comma before and after a consecutive introductory prepositional phrase.

Example: *At the end of the day in Chicago,* people rush home from work.

Use a comma after an introductory participle or participial phrase.

Example: *Inspired by the professor’s comments,* Ellie decided to go to law school.

Use a comma after an introductory adverb clause.

Example: *Before we boarded the airplane,* we needed to pass through security.

Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives that are placed before a noun.

Example: My Girl Scout troop is a *dedicated, kind* group.

Use a comma to separate independent clauses joined by the conjunctions for, and, nor, but, or, and yet.

Example: Troop 320 wanted to go camping, *but* it was too cold to sleep in tents.

Use a comma to cue a word or words in direct address.

Example: *Jim,* can you reach the top shelf?

Use a comma to cue a parenthetical expression like such as, I believe, and for example.

Example: This, *I believe,* is the best way to solve the problem.

Use a comma at the beginning and end of an appositive phrase.

Example: Susan, *my dear friend,* likes to kayak.



LESSON 2: COMMAS

PART 2

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Overview and Tips for Classroom Implementation

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Step-by-Step Lesson Instructions

Step One Make copies of the Five More Comma Rules (see figure 4) for each student. The students can place a copy, for reference, in their writing folder or classroom notebook.

Step Two Prior to the lesson, create Comma Rule envelopes for each pair of students with the following contents:

- A complete set of the sentence strips (see figure 2).
- 10 commas (see figure 2)
- Directions for the activity (see figure 2)

Step Three Assign an envelope to a pair of students. Each student pair will “dump” the contents from the envelope and insert commas where needed for each sentence.

Additional Tips

Time the students for this activity. Five minutes should be plenty of time for the student pairs to complete this activity. It is also helpful for the students if the sentences are printed on different color paper. The commas are all printed on the same color paper that is different from the sentences. Using different colors helps the students to sort and categorize the information in this task.



FIGURE 4

FIVE MORE COMMA RULES

Use a comma after the salutation in a friendly letter.

Example: Dear Mom,

Use a comma after the closing in a friendly or business letter.

Example: Sincerely,

Use a comma to separate items in dates and addresses:

Examples:

July 9, 2001

1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C

Use a comma to separate the speaker from the speaker's direct quotation.

Example: "I need to ask you a question," Ellie said.

Use a comma after a mild interjection.

Example: Oh, you startled me.



FIGURE 2

SENTENCES, COMMAS AND DIRECTIONS

Directions: In this envelope there are ten sentences that need commas. Using your “Five More Comma Rule” reference sheet, insert commas where needed. Use the comma cards and place them in the location where the comma is needed in the following sentence.

,	,	,	,
,	,	,	,
,	,	,	,

Colin would like to go to the park but he needs to finish his homework.

Her birthday is on July 15 1998.

Tanisha can you open the window some more?

The band performed in Chicago New York London and Paris.

Our friends who are always thoughtful made us some cookies for the party.

More determined than ever the baseball player swung even harder.

Mr. King the well known author has another bestseller

The long exhausting swim lesson finally finished

“I moved from London to New York” the model explained.

The editor asked “Are you sure that you can meet the deadline?”



LESSON 3 : COMMA MATCH

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Overview and Tips for Classroom Implementation

This lesson provides continued practice and application of the comma rules. The students will work in teams to match the rules with the different examples.

Step-by-Step Lesson Instructions

Step One Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students. Each student will need an envelope with the following:

- Cards with each comma rule (see figure 3). Print these cards on light blue paper or card stock.
- Cards with the examples (see figure 4). Print these cards on yellow paper or card stock.
- You will need to make the envelopes for this activity before you conduct this lesson.

Step Two Once the students have been divided into groups with 3-4 members, provide the following directions:

Match the reasons or rules for using a comma (these cards are light blue) with the examples. The examples are printed on yellow cards. You have five minutes to complete the activity.

In addition to providing these instructions verbally, be sure to write them down for the students on the chalkboard or on the envelopes that the students are using for this activity.

Step Three As the students are working, be sure to circulate among the groups. This is always a great opportunity to clarify instructions and explain examples or rules for which the students have questions.

Additional Tips

Be sure to print the comma rules on color paper and the examples on a different colored paper. This helps the students to organize the information. In addition, it makes it easier for you to observe the students as they work on this activity as you circulate among the groups.



FIGURE 3

COMMA RULES

Print these rules on light blue paper or card stock.

Comma should be placed after the salutation of a friendly letter.	Comma should be placed after the closing of a friendly or business letter.
Comma should be placed to separate items in dates and addresses.	Comma should be placed to separate the speaker from the quotation.
Comma should be placed to set off the consecutive introductory prepositional phrases.	Comma should be placed to separate nonessential or nonrestrictive clause.
Comma should be placed to separate two or more adjectives that precede a noun.	Commas should be placed to separate independent clauses joined by a conjunction.
Comma should be placed to set off words in direct address.	Commas should be placed after an introductory participial phrase.



FIGURE 4

COMMA RULES

Print these rules on yellow paper or card stock.

In the beginning of the day, the rooster crowed.	Ellie asked, "Can we go the Girl Scout meeting?"
Dear Jim,	Chased by the sheriff, the criminal surrendered.
An informed, trained representative will help you.	Very Truly Yours,
We completed the assignment, but it was not graded.	Colin, is that you in the drawing?
I was married on August 10, 1991.	These volunteers, who are going to the dinner later, are all members of the committee.

