



Comma Usage

Rules for Using a Comma

- Use a comma to separate the clauses of a compound sentence connected by a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so* and *yet*). The comma is placed *before* the coordinating conjunction, not after.
- Example:
 - *The students ate spaghetti for dinner, but no one cleaned his plate.*

Rules for Using a Comma

- However, do not use a comma before *and*, *but*, *or* and *nor* when they link pairs of words, phrases or elements other than main clauses.
 - **Example:**
 - *I gave three books to John and four to Nancy.*
- The trick here is to recognize if the conjunction separates a main clause (or major thought), or if it simply links pairs of words or phrases.

Rules for Using a Comma

- The comma separates two or more adjectives modifying the same noun if *and* could be used between them without changing the meaning.
- **Example:**
 - *Janine pushed her long, straight hair out of her eyes.*
- In this sentence, the two adjectives, **long** and **straight**, are both describing Janine's hair. This is why it is ok to use a comma between them. If in doubt, **AND** may be used instead.

Rules for Using a Comma

- The comma also separates the items in a list or a series
- Example:
 - *Jasmine visited the park, the museum, the court house, and the historical hotel on the last day of her vacation.*

The comma before the AND is optional.

Rules for Using a Comma

- A comma is used set off a quotation from a dialogue tag.
 - **Example:**
 - *He said, "I didn't do it."*
 - *"I don't believe it," Jason replied, "but maybe if you prove it, I will."*
- The comma is used with introductory elements
 - **Example:**
 - *No, he didn't wear a hat.*
 - *Well, that was the just the beginning of my problems.*
- A comma sets off a tag question from the rest of the sentence
 - **Example:**
 - *I didn't see it there, did you?*
 - *That's the best movie of the year, isn't it?*

The Semicolon vs. The Comma

Use a semicolon when you link two independent clauses with no connecting words.

- **Examples:**

- I am going home; I intend to stay there.
- It rained heavily during the afternoon; we managed to have our picnic anyway.
- They couldn't make it to the summit and back before dark; they decided to camp for the night.

- Use a comma after the first independent clause when you link two independent clauses with one of the following coordinating conjunctions: and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet.
- **These are the same sentences using a comma instead of the semicolon**

- **Examples:**

- I am going home, and I intend to stay there.
- It rained heavily during the afternoon, but we managed to have our picnic anyway.
- They couldn't make it to the summit and back before dark, so they decided to camp for the night

Double Negatives

- A double negative is the nonstandard usage of two negatives used in the same sentence so that they cancel each other and create a positive
- The following list contains words that are regarded as negative. If you use them in your sentences once, your statements will be negative.
 - no
 - not
 - none
 - Nothing
 - Nowhere
 - barely
 - neither
 - nobody
 - no one
 - hardly
 - scarcely

Double Negatives

- Positive Construction
negative + negative

Sentence

Meaning

I hardly have none.

I have some.

I don't want nothing. I want something.

Negative Construction

negative + positive

I hardly have any.

I have few.

I don't want anything. I want nothing.

References

- Tritt, Sandy. (2002). *Elements of craft comma usage*. Retrieved May 2, 2008, from <http://users.wirefire.com/tritt/tip18.html>
- *Commas vs. Semicolons in Compound Sentences*. (2004). Retrieved May 2, 2008, from Purdue University, http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_commacomp.html