

Basic Uses of the Comma

With nonrestrictive adjective clauses (including those reduced into phrases)

1. Rudy Giuliani, the mayor of New York, has always been a controversial figure.
2. Jamestown, founded in 1607, was the first English settlement here.
3. Her dress, blue with gold buttons, cost a surprising \$49.99.
4. My parents, to whom I owe my excellent upbringing, were fine people.

With introductory adverb clauses

1. Because Olga is so kind, everyone admires her.
2. When a tornado comes, go underground.
3. While I was swimming in the ocean, my husband was playing golf.

With introductory prepositional phrases of five words or more (otherwise optional)

1. On the second floor of the Humanities Building, there is a cafeteria.
2. At about 8:00 it gets dark during the summer.
3. In the darkest corner of the attic, I found my grandfather's collection of old stamps.

With introductory interjections, exclamations, and names

1. Mr. Smith, please meet my father, Mr. Jones.
2. I'm sorry, did you say something?
3. Thank you, I'll just stand.

With two or more coordinate adjectives

1. Ida made us a sweet, buttery apple strudel.
2. Mrs. Brown, your daughter is an intelligent, creative student.
3. That was a compelling, fascinating, newsworthy debate.
4. My mother is a persistent, focused, and dependable person.

note: A comma before "and" is in good style but optional.

With three or more coordinate adverbs, nouns, or verb phrases

1. Paulo plays the violin passionately, expertly, and creatively.
2. Peter, Paul, and Mary sang at Carnegie Hall ten years ago.
3. My mom cracked the eggs, dropped them in the pan, fried them.

note: When there are only two elements, use "and":

4. She cracked the eggs and dropped them in the pan.

With addresses, dates, and times

1. I live at 816 Carroll St., Brooklyn, New York.
2. He was born on January 31, 1916.
3. My uncle died at 5:01 A.M., October 6, 1999.

With "interrupters" (comments inserted in a sentence)

1. I am a doctor like my father. My older brother, on the other hand, is a lawyer.
2. He is, to say the least, an argumentative person.

Before conjunctions that separate two independent clauses (if the sentence is short, the comma is optional).

1. He yells at me in his loudest voice, so I get too flustered to speak.
2. Whenever we get together we have fun, and we always spend more than we should.
3. I love him but he's crazy.