

CAPTAIN



COMMA

Comma usage can make writers crabby. In fact, this small, curved punctuation mark causes more snags than almost any other element in writing. Many people have been told to put a comma where they pause, but this only works if we all pause in the same place. Commas act as an anchor in sentences, securing information in chunks so that we can process it more easily.

Steer your way to success the easy way with the seven categories of comma usage in the **CAPTAIN** acrostic:

Compound sentence with coordinating conjunction

After introductory phrases, mild interjections, and transitions

Parenthetical elements, including appositives and nonrestrictive elements

To prevent confusion

According to convention

Items in a series

Noncumulative adjectives



<p style="font-size: 48pt; text-align: center;">C</p>	<p>Compound Sentence with Coordinating Conjunction Place a comma before coordinating conjunctions in compound sentences that contain two independent clauses. You can remember the coordinating conjunctions by using the FANBOYS acrostic (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).</p> <p><i>We wanted to watch the whales, so we went down to the shore.</i></p>
<p style="font-size: 48pt; text-align: center;">A</p>	<p>After Introductory Phrases, Mild Interjections, and Transitions</p> <p>Introductory Phrase <i>Although we like George Clooney, we hated the film “A Perfect Storm.”</i></p> <p>Mild Interjection <i>George Clooney, you bottom feeding scum, we hated your film.</i></p> <p>Transition <i>The film is a real stinker, although we usually like George Clooney.</i></p>
<p style="font-size: 48pt; text-align: center;">P</p>	<p>Parenthetical Elements, Including Appositives and Nonrestrictive Elements</p> <p>Parenthetical Elements <i>Melville’s most famous work, Moby Dick, is often read in literature courses.</i></p> <p>Appositive An appositive defines or restates a noun.</p> <p><i>Moby Dick, a rather long book, is often read in literature courses.</i></p> <p>Nonrestrictive Elements Nonrestrictive elements add information but not meaning. You could eliminate them from the sentence without changing the meaning of the sentence itself.</p> <p><i>The boat, which was full of snow crab, looked weather-beaten.</i></p>
<p style="font-size: 48pt; text-align: center;">T</p>	<p>To Prevent Confusion Use a comma when it will help your reader understand your sentence more easily, particularly when two similar words appear side by side in the sentence.</p> <p><i>The sail boat we wanted to win, won the regatta.</i></p> <p><i>To err is human; to forgive, divine.</i></p>

A

According to Convention

Use a comma to set off

- Direct responses like
Well, Starbuck, I think they sailed that way.
- Direct quotations like
The first line of Moby Dick is, "Call me Ishmael."
- Dates like
May 1, 2012

If the date is not the last word in the sentence, place a comma after the year:

We will meet on May 1, 2012, right before the ship sails.

- Professional or honorary titles like
Patrick Starfish, M.D.
- Addresses like
*501 Whale Way
Seattle, Washington*

If the state is not the last word in the sentence, place a comma after the state:

Please come to 501 Whale Way, Seattle, Washington, this Saturday.

- Interrogative tags
I thought the sailors were like fish out of water, weren't they?
- Numbers like
5,000 or 5,000,000

I

Items in a Series

Although you may have been taught to leave out the comma before the "and" in a series, it's actually more correct to use it. This last comma is sometimes called the Oxford comma, and it can add clarity.

I would like to thank my parents, Captain Ahab, and Moby Dick.
(Try reading the sentence without that last comma!)

N

Noncumulative Adjectives

Noncumulative adjectives are interchangeable. You can change the order of the adjectives without changing the meaning of the sentence.

The captain's cabin is little, airless, cramped, and messy.

