

COMMAS

We use comma in numerous ways, including:

- 1) Elements in a series
- 2) Comma plus coordinating conjunction
- 3) Introductory elements
- 4) Non-defining clauses
- 5) Other uses – quotation, avoiding confusion, etc.

Sentence vs. clause

Sentence is usually a text separated by a full stop, exclamation mark or a question mark.

Clause is usually a group of words containing a subject and a verb.

Professor Thompson, who used to work for the President, is currently the head of this faculty.

a) Independent clauses

- Can stand on their own and still make sense
 - o *Johnson didn't feel like going to work, but he went to work anyway.*

b) Dependent clause

- Do not make sense when standing on their own. Must be combined with an independent clause to work.
 - o *When you finish doing the dishes, you can play your video games.*
 - o *The machine, which was just recently purchased, developed a mind of its own.*

Independent clauses

- Often connected by a **coordinating conjunction**: *For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So* = **FANBOYS**
- Almost always accompanied by a comma! BUT sometimes not needed:
 - o *Johnson didn't feel like going to work, but he went to work anyway.*
 - o *Johnson was ill but he still came to work.*

Dependent clauses

- Often connected by **subordinating conjunctions**: after, although, before, even though, if, once, rather than, so that, until, whenever...
 - o Although Květa thought about joining the army, she never discussed it with anyone.
 - o Květa never discussed her wish to join the army, because she was afraid people would ridicule her.
- Cannot stand by themselves because they do not make sense.
 - o Adverb clauses: *When the show is over, we can go for a drink.*
 - o Adjective clauses: *My sister, who is an engineer, helped me a lot.*
 - o Noun clauses: *What he knows [subject] is no concern of mine.*

Sometimes, however, we may have to omit a comma to make our statement clear!

He didn't run, because he was afraid.

He didn't run because he was afraid. He ran because a giant tarantula just ate a "šalina."

Avoiding confusion

- For most the year is already finished.
- For most, the year is already finished.
- Outside the lawn was cluttered with hundreds of broken branches.
- Outside, the lawn was cluttered with hundreds of broken branches.

Exercise 1: Insert commas where necessary.

- 1) After a hard day at the office I like to relax with a large gin.
- 2) The recipe needed jam flour sugar fruit eggs ketchup and baking powder.
- 3) "Look at this" he whispered.
- 4) Paulina his wife of many years had decided to go and live in Greece.
- 5) As the sun began to sink over the sea Karen got ready to go out.
- 6) The thief was wearing impractical high heels so she could not run fast.
- 7) The thief who was wearing impractical high heels could not run fast.
- 8) We go to Blackpool for the cuisine not the weather.
- 9) Their son Steven was their only child.
- 10) Steven his head still spinning walked out of the office for the last time.

Exercise 2: The following sentences are extremely confusing. Insert commas to avoid confusion.

- 1) Before leaving the soldiers demolished the fort.
- 2) As she was rising to speak her mind suddenly played a cruel trick and she forgot her speech.
- 3) Shelley having drowned Byron presided over the funeral ceremonies on the beach.
- 4) Did the lion eat Fred?
- 5) Let's eat grandpa.

Exercise 3: More comma practice.

- a) In theory, the dark smoke from the burning oil wells absorbs sunlight and the surrounding air is heated.
- b) The anticipation that biological and chemical weapons would be used caused unprecedented stress for the troops.
- c) It seems that she answered the question easily but her answer was actually quite complex.
- d) It can be beneficial to register for classes early yet each student must wait his or her turn.

- e) Analyzing the data reveals public support of conflict for as environmental issues become a variable, attitudes towards war become more complex.
- f) Because of mass destruction to the system, sewage overflowed and spread diseases.
- g) He could either go to the store or go to the basketball game.
- h) I did not want to go to class nor did I want to write that paper.
- i) She worried about finding someone to take care of the dog and provide a good home for him.
- j) I did not want to scare him so I did not tell him about the accident.

Exercise 4: Question Marks, Quotation Marks, and Apostrophes Quiz

Correct the sentences which contain errors. Remember, some are correct!

1. I went to my mother's-in-law house for dinner.
2. Do you know when he arrived?
3. Both secretary's computer skills were excellent.
4. Women's dresses are on the second floor.
5. Why did you ask, "Where's your husband?"?
6. "The UFO is in the shed", she said.
7. She asked me why I had put the UFO in the shed?
8. If its her's, don't use it!
9. There's a hidden camera in all of the prisoners' cells.
10. He smiled at his gun and said that it was his "special little helper".
11. "If you can't say anything nice" he said, "then don't speak at all!"
12. Why do you say that I'm "a waste of oxygen"?
13. I don't want to live in Bob's and Bobek's old house.
14. "'To be or not to be comes from Hamlet," she told us.
15. [From an essay] After the "dumb show" in scene IV, it appears that Hamlet "wimps out" of confronting his stepfather.