

Four (Simplified) Comma Rules

While punctuation rules are often seen as either right or wrong, sometimes the “rules” depend on your purpose. Here are four simplified comma rules to tell you where and when to use a comma.

1. Signal Beginning

Rule: Commas signal where the main statement in a sentence begins.

EX: As far as I am concerned, Thanksgiving is a boring holiday.

Metaphor: Commas are a visual start line

Like a starting line,



a comma can signal where the race begins.

2. Change Direction

Rule: Commas signal a change in the direction or focus of a sentence.

EX: I like dogs, but not cats.

Metaphor: Commas alert the reader to a turn in the road

Racers need a warning before
they turn a corner

,



so a comma alerts the reader
to an upcoming turn.

3. Separate Supplemental Information

Rule: Commas separate vital from extra information (*does not apply to 2 independent clauses*)

EX: Aaron thought he could see the future, not the past, in the wrinkles on his skin.

Metaphor: Commas offer a water station

Races offer supplemental
supplies and fuel

,

like water

,

just as commas bracket
supplemental information.



4. Distinguish Complete Statements

Rule: Commas distinguish complete statements linked with a coordinating conjunction (*i.e., for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*).

EX: Jenny tried the sushi, and she found that it was surprisingly tasty.

Metaphor: Commas signal the halfway point

Some races signal
a new phase ,



and commas signal a new
section of the sentence

These distilled rules will help you more easily consider how punctuation affects readers understanding of your ideas. They will NOT apply to every scenario, but can serve as a beneficial rule of thumb. Note that in these further examples, there is some overlap to the rules.

More Examples

Type	Example
Signal beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, recent studies have overlooked the impact of pressure on the material. • In stage II, the material was titrated. • After examining three cases, this paper will advance a new theory.
Change direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new filter was more accurate, although it had a longer running time. • The data were obtained, and they were subsequently analyzed in MINEPROGRAM. • Prosthetic legs help patients gain function, while physical therapy builds balance.
Separate non-essential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The metal, because it was impure, did not conduct electricity at high temperatures. • Note the correlation coefficient, which shows that these are excellent fits to the data. • The data, summarized in Table 2, show a synthesis of the values from the literature.
Distinguish complete statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current research has focused on X, but researchers have overlooked Y. • Society depends on its traditions, and the authority of the written text is one of those. • The main meeting is on the sixth floor, so lunch will be on the fifth floor.