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



so a comma alerts the reader to an upcoming turn.

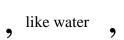
3. Separate Supplemental Information

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



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

Туре	Example
Signal	However, recent studies have overlooked the impact of pressure on the material.
beginning	In stage II, the material was titrated.
	After examining three cases, this paper will advance a new theory.
Change	The new filter was more accurate, although it had a longer running time.
direction	The data were obtained, and they were subsequently analyzed in MINEPROGRAM.
	Prosthetic legs help patients gain function, while physical therapy builds balance.
Separate	• The metal, because it was impure, did not conduct electricity at high temperatures.
non-	Note the correlation coefficient, which shows that these are excellent fits to the
essential	data.
	The data, summarized in Table 2, show a synthesis of the values from the
	literature.
Distinguish	Current research has focused on X, but researchers have overlooked Y.
complete	Society depends on its traditions, and the authority of the written text is one of
statements	those.
	The main meeting is on the sixth floor, so lunch will be on the fifth floor.