

Comma Rules

Rule #1 (See page 170 of *Least You Should Know about English* 11th Edition)

Put a comma before for, and, nor, but or, yet, so when they connect two independent clauses.

(Remember these seven words as the **fan boys**, technically they are called coordinating conjunctions.)

(Coordinating conjunctions: **F**or **B**ut
 And **O**r
 Nor **Y**et
 So remember, "**fan boys**.")

Examples:

We all brought our essays to class, **and** the instructor collected them.

Some teenage girls walked the hot summer streets, **and** the teenage guys drove their cars.

Rule #2 (See page 170 of *Least You Should Know* 11th Edition)

Use a comma to separate items in a series, date, or address. Occasionally, writers leave out the comma before the "**and**" connecting the last two items in a series, but **it is needed** to separate all of the items equally.

Ex: Students in literature classes read short stories, poems, and plays.
 Magazines, paperback novels, and textbooks crowded the shelves.

Rule #2 continues: **If an address or date is used in a sentence, treat it as a series, putting a comma after every item, including the last.

Example: My father was born on May 17, 1975, in Santa Barbara, California, and grew up there.
 Grandma lived in San Francisco, California, for five years.

Rule #2 continues: **When only the month and year are used in a date, the commas are omitted.

Example: In May 1998 he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio.

Rule #3 (See page 171 of *Least You Should Know* 11th Edition)

Use a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or dependent clause that begins a sentence and before a tag question or comment that ends it. Ex:

If the store is closed, please come home immediately.
Running down the hill, the girl slipped and fell.
Well, that was the end of that.
It's cold this morning, isn't it?

Comma Rules (continued):

Rule 4, 5, and 6 function on the “Ribbon” concept: think about a ribbon with a tail at each end.

Rule #4 (See page 177 of *Least You Should Know* 11th Edition)
Put commas around the name of a person spoken to.

Ex: Will you go to the store, Sally, and get some milk? _____, imagine the word **Sally** sitting on a ribbon with a tail at each end. Grab those tails, lift the ribbon and the word out of the sentence.
Please, Mike, can you spare a dollar?
Please, Mark, turn off the television.

Rule #5 (See page 177 of *Least You Should Know* 11th Edition)

Put commas around interrupters (such as: however, moreover, finally, therefore, of course, by the way, on the other hand, I am sure, I believe, I think, too). They are expressions that interrupt.

Ex: It should, I think, take only an hour. _____, imagine the words **I think** sitting on a ribbon with a tail at each end. Grab those tails, lift the ribbon and the words out of the sentence.

We took our plates, of course, and got in line.

Rule #6 (See page 178 of *Least You Should Know* 11th edition)

Put commas around additional material that is not essential in the sentence (nonrestrictive clauses). Such material may be interesting, but the main idea of the sentence would be clear without it.

Ex: *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck, was a bestseller. _____, imagine the words **by John Steinbeck** sitting on a ribbon with a tail at each end. Grab those tails, lift the ribbon and the words out of the sentence.

Rule #7 (See page 185 *Least You Should Know* 11th Edition)

Use commas to enclose a direct quotation within a sentence unless the quotation ends with an exclamation mark or a question mark.

Ex: Tony said, "Jack will arrive at 8 o'clock."
"The evidence was thorough," the jury member said.

Ex: "Construction of the permanent campus began in late summer, 1967, and on January 6, 1969, the new facilities were occupied and placed into full operation," said the local historian.

"Will you be ready for the exams on Friday?" asked the interested friend.

"The most important asset is the will to study!" exclaimed the instructor.

Rule #8 (This is not found in a textbook, handbook, or manual, but quite helpful)

Use a comma to clarify the meaning of a sentence, even though no other rule calls for one.

Where should the comma be placed?

Ex: Of the gymnastic team's twenty five were injured.
Those who can practice many hours a day.