

University of Houston Clear Lake

WRITING CENTER

Six Comma Rules

1. FANBOYS: Put a comma before using *for, and, not, but, or, yet, so* (FANBOYS), when they connect two independent clauses (complete sentences). When a FANBOYS connects two or more independent clauses (word groups that could stand alone or as separate sentences) a comma must precede the FANBOYS conjunction. For example:

- Jan and Sue started to play video games, and they ended their studying.
- Bob may take his children to the zoo today, or he might try to go on Monday when the zoo is free.

Be sure that your sentence does contain two independent clauses. The following sentence is one independent clause with one subject and two verbs:

- Jill wanted to take an extra class but didn't have time to enroll.

2. Introductory Expressions: Put a comma after an introductory expression that doesn't flow smoothly into the sentence or before an afterthought that is tacked on. It may be a word, a group of words, or a dependent clause. For example:

- Yes, I will go to the park with you today.
- When I arrived home, the front door was unlocked.
- It's very important to be on time for meetings, isn't it?
- However, we decided not to go to the park today.

3. Lists: Put a comma between items in a series. For example:

- I need milk, bread, ice cream, and potatoes from the store.
- Fred walked into the room, introduced himself to everyone, and sat down.

Some words go together naturally and don't need a comma between them even though they do make up a series or list of adjectives. For example:

- A large vase containing bright red roses was sitting on the desk.

In the case of listings where you already have commas within the sentence for smaller separations, a semicolon is used to show bigger separations.

- On our vacation we went to San Antonio, Texas; Memphis, Tennessee; and Atlanta, Georgia.

4. Names: Put commas around the name of a person spoken to. For example:

- I hope, Marie, that you will help me with my project.
- Jonathan, your dog is getting bigger every time I see him.

5. Transition Phrases: Put commas around an expression that interrupts the flow of the sentence or works as a way to transition your ideas, such as in the following: *however, moreover, finally, therefore, of course, by the way, on the other hand, I am sure, I think*. Examples in a sentence:

- I believe, of course, you will help me carry my art project to class.
- We decided, however, to leave the largest suitcase at home.
- This vacation, I think, was the best we've ever had.

6. Additive Information: Put commas around nonessential material or additive information used to provide additional details to the sentence. For these sentences, the meaning of what the author is saying remains the same if you entirely remove the content between the commas. For example:

- Ross Johnson, who is a professor at our college, gave a lecture on the importance of bees.
- This shirt I am wearing, which I bought at the Renaissance Festival, was very expensive.