

COMMA USAGE

Using commas can be tricky, especially if you have heard differing opinions on comma usage in the past. However, some rules are always the same. **Use commas:**

- When listing a series of items
I speak English, Spanish, and French.
David, Leigh, and Robert want to learn a new language.
- When using a conjunction (and, or, but, nor, for, so, yet) to combine two sentences
I speak Spanish, but I am also fluent in French.
I am learning French, and I hope to travel to Paris.
- After using an introductory phrase (look for dependent clause markers such as *when* or *after*)
When learning a new language, practice is essential.
After you learn one new language, learning another is easy.
- To encompass a non-essential phrase (a phrase that provides additional information but does not change the structure of the sentence)
Mary, my friend from French class, is majoring in Spanish.
Dr. Brown, who is a chemistry professor, was born in France.
- To encompass an interrupting phrase
I can help you with Spanish or, if you prefer, show you some good books.
It is true, isn't it, that French and Spanish are both Romance languages.
- To set off a direct address word
Yes, I enjoy learning new languages.
You must take a foreign language, Kayla, in order to earn a B.A.
- To separate multiple adjectives
I found some quick, simple guides for learning French.
We watched a long, boring movie in Spanish class.
- To set off quotations
She asked, "Is it useful to know Spanish when we live so close to Mexico?"
"Grammar between English and French is very similar," he said.

Many writers use commas throughout their sentences without having a real reason. You should never use a comma unless you have a definitive reason for doing so. **Do not use commas:**

- To join two sentences without a conjunction; this is called a comma splice
I learned French two years ago, it was difficult.
I hope to travel Europe, I need to save my money.
Instead:
I hope to travel to Europe. I need to save money.
- To separate the subject of a sentence from the verb
Learning Spanish, was hard work.
Mary, went to the French Riviera.
Instead:
Mary went to the French Riviera.
- To separate a verb from an object
I read a book that described, the French Revolution.
Most citizens of Spain and France are, members of the Catholic Church.

Instead:

Most citizens of Spain and France are members of the Catholic Church.

- To separate a *that* clause from the rest of the sentence
She told me, that she would like to learn Spanish.
She thinks, that it would be a useful skill.

Instead:

She thinks that it would be a useful skill.

- To join incomplete sentences with a conjunction
I want to travel to France, and want to go to Spain.
My sister wants to go there, but doesn't speak the language.

Instead:

My sister wants to go there but doesn't speak the language.
My sister wants to go there, but she doesn't speak the language.

- To separate an adjective from an adjacent noun
He is an engaging and knowledgeable, professor.
It was an informative, course.

Instead:

It was an informative course.

- To break up an adjective phrase (an adjective modified by another word; these words depend on each other and should not be separated)

My French book has a dark, blue cover
My professor gives well, developed explanations.

Instead:

My professor gives well developed explanations.

If you are unsure about where to place commas, you may want to read your paper aloud and place commas where you naturally pause in speaking. However, this method is not always correct. You should not put commas in places that interrupt your flow of speaking. When in doubt, check your comma placement using the rules listed above or a writing handbook.

Sources Consulted

Ruszkiewicz, John, Christy Friend, and Maxine Hairston, eds. *The Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.

Yarber, Mary Laine, and Robert E. Yarber, eds. *Reviewing Basic Grammar*. 4th ed. United States: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 1997.