

Journalism Style

Additional Rules for Comma Usage

The *Journalism Style* exercises in Chapters 13 and 14 describe ways that commas are used in journalistic writing. Here are additional uses for the comma. Journalists use them the same way as most other writers.

Separate Independent Clauses Joined by Coordinate Conjunctions

When two independent clauses are joined to make a compound sentence, a comma is needed just before the conjunction. Most often, compound sentences use one of seven *coordinating conjunctions*, also known as FANBOYS: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*. It is worth memorizing the FANBOYS because the other 30 or 40 common conjunctions **do not** automatically require a comma.

Hint: In addition to using one of the FANBOYS, a compound sentence will have a clear subject on each side of the conjunction.

Compound sentence: *He dared her, so she did it.* (*He* and *she* are the two subjects, so you need a comma before *so*.)

Not a compound sentence: *He dared her and called her a coward.* (Only one subject, so only one independent clause. No comma.)

Here are the FANBOYS in action, joining an unlikely pair of musicians.

Rachel plays the fiddle. Ben plays the synthesizer. If these two independent clauses are joined by one of the FANBOYS, they remain equal and independent—and need a comma before the conjunction.

Rachel plays the fiddle, for Ben plays the synthesizer.

Rachel plays the fiddle, and Ben plays the synthesizer.

Rachel does not play the fiddle, nor does Ben play the synthesizer.

Rachel plays the fiddle, but Ben plays the synthesizer.

Rachel plays the fiddle, or Ben plays the synthesizer.

Rachel plays the fiddle, yet Ben plays the synthesizer.

Rachel plays the fiddle, so Ben plays the synthesizer.

Divide Figures Larger Than 999

The flood left 2,753 people homeless.

The major exceptions are house numbers (1665 Harney St.), years (2016), telephone numbers, serial numbers and broadcast frequencies (1350 kilohertz).

Follow the Salutation and Complimentary Close in a Friendly Letter

A friendly letter is an informal letter written to a friend or relative. Punctuation and format are different than in business letters.

*Dear Dad,
Send money.
Love,
Your son*

Set Off Nouns in Direct Address

Silvie, you won!

Listen up, you guys.

I'm sorry, Mary, but your portfolio for Journalist of the Year is disqualified because it has too many pages.

Follow Each Item in Full Addresses and Dates

When writing a full address or a full date (day, month and year) as part of a sentence, use a comma to set off each item.

Forward my mail to 1665 S.E. Harney St., Portland, Oregon. (Do not include the ZIP code.)

On June 5, 1995, he set sail for Hawaii.

Indicate Omitted Verbs

If the commas did not replace the omitted verb in the following example, this sentence would have used *ate* three times instead of one. Note that semicolons separate the clauses.

I ate sushi; Jim, watermelon; and Rachel, tofu.

For Clarity

Use commas to avoid confusion.

My name is Bond, James Bond.

This is my book, not yours.

What it is, is anybody's guess.

Try It!

1. Create two independent clauses. Then join them with each of the FANBOYS, using the comma correctly.
2. Use commas correctly as you write each of the following. Feel free to have fun as you compose.
 - A. a sentence showing commas used to divide numbers greater than 999
 - B. a friendly letter showing commas used with a salutation and a complimentary close
 - C. a sentence in which commas set off nouns used in direct address
 - D. a sentence incorporating a full address and a full date
 - E. at least one strong sentence using commas to indicate omitted, duplicate verbs
 - F. a sentence in which one or more commas are needed for clarity