

COMMAS AND APOSTROPHES

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

USING COMMAS

in compound and complex sentences

Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS) that joins two complete sentences.	> We knew the test was hard, so we studied. > We will solve the problem, or they will suffer.
Use a comma at the end of a dependent clause that isn't at the end of the sentence.	> Because these rules matter, I will test you. > If you don't learn them, you won't pass.

with transitions and added information

Use a comma to separate introductory or transitional words or phrases.	> Yes, you can have another cookie. > Too many cookies, of course, are not good.
Use commas before and after any words or phrases in a sentence that are not necessary.	> My resume, unfortunately, contained errors. > The doctor, who lives nearby, walks to work.

with lists and quotations

Use a comma after each item in a list of three (not two) or more items.	> She enjoys skating, golf, running, and tennis. > David and Michael live and work in Seattle.
Use a comma to separate a quotation from the rest of the sentence.	> "I'm going to Africa," he announced. > "I," he said, "am going to Africa."

with dates and places

Use a comma to separate the day of the week from the date and the date from the year. If the day, date, or year is not the last word in the sentence, use a comma after it.	> We met on Tuesday, May 8, 2001, at the gym. > They got married on Sunday, after breakfast. > December 7, 1941, was Pearl Harbor Day.
Use a comma to separate cities, states, and countries. A comma follows the state or country if it is not at the end of the sentence.	> Lara lives in Lima, Ohio, but was born in Tijuana, Mexico. > Ellen visits Bogotá, Colombia, every year.

for addressing other people

Use a comma to set off the name of the person being addressed.	> Sir, could you please turn your radio down? > Mother, I told you I can't stay for dinner.
Use commas after the name of the person to whom you are writing a friendly letter and after the closing.	> Dear Robert, I hope you understand all the rules. Love, Angela

APOSTROPHE BASICS

RULE	EXAMPLES
Use an apostrophe to replace letters removed in contractions.	> did not = didn't > would have = would've
Use -'s after nouns (singular or plural) that don't end in -s to show possession.	> David's truck > the men's room
Use an apostrophe alone to show possession nouns (singular or plural) that end in s.	> Carlos' girlfriend > the students' assignments
Use an apostrophe to pluralize something that doesn't normally have a plural form.	> There are too many maybe's in life. > She dots her i's with hearts.

DO NOT

DO NOT use an apostrophe to make a noun plural.	> I go to as many parties as I can. > She always buys bananas.
DO NOT use an apostrophe in possessive pronouns..	> That money isn't theirs. > We used hers, and she used ours.

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LEARN MORE

Don't forget: students can always ask tutors or their teachers for an explanation of anything that's not clear.

Texts available to use in The SLC English Writing Lab:

<i>Grassroots with Readings</i> , Ninth Edition Susan Fawcett Chapters 27 and 28	<i>Evergreen, A Guide to Writing with Readings</i> , Ninth Edition, Susan Fawcett Chapters 35 and 36	<i>The Bedford Handbook</i> , Seventh Edition, Diana Hacker Chapters 32, 33, & 36
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Online:

[Grassroots Companion Site](#)

[Evergreen Companion Site](#)

[Commas: Quick Rules](#)

[Quiz on Comma Usage](#)

[The Apostrophe](#)

[Catastrophes of Apostrophic Proportions](#)

[Rules for Comma Usage](#)

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PRACTICE

This passage has no commas or apostrophes. Add them where they belong to make sure you understand the rules about using commas and apostrophes.

The space shuttle Discovery was launched for the first time on August 30 1984. Ill always remember that day because it was my eighth birthday and I got my first real two-wheeler: a Schwinn Aerostar. Watching Discoverys blast-off from Cocoa Beach Florida on TV was the entertainment for the kids who came to my party. After that we had cake and then finally I got to take the Aerostar for its first spin around the block. Since then my memories of that day and of my “new” bike have snapped into sharp focus every time Discovery has gone up.

When I was in sixth grade Discovery took off the day I got to give the morning announcements. She also went up in 1991 on the day I got my learners permit and returned safely from another mission the following year on the day I got my license. On July 13 1995 when I was almost 18 I bought my first car and Discovery went into orbit again. I started a new job on Monday May 27 1997 and you guessed it there was a launch that day to celebrate. Thanks NASA.

NASA launched Discovery again on July 4 2006 and she returned safely on July 17. I happened to be at my parents house for dinner that night. “Lets put the TV on for the shuttle landing” suggested Mom and we watched Discovery glide onto the runway trailing her parachute before we sat down to eat. She wasn’t the sleek spacecraft of the future that she had been on my eighth birthday but she was still doing her job and she still managed to touch my heart.

After dinner I went out to the garage to see if my old Aerostar was still there. I found her in a corner and couldnt resist pumping up her tires and taking her out. She wasnt the sleek dream-machine she had been when I was eight, but she was still doing her job and she still managed to touch my heart.