

## Commas

by Ryan Joy

- **Commas Before Coordinating Conjunctions that Join Two Independent Clauses**
  - *Mary Shelly's Frankenstein* is a good film, but it is not an accurate depiction of the events that take place in the novel.
  - In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus rarely does anything out of the good of his heart, and he commits many unethical acts..

{For more information, see the section on Run-ons.}
- **Commas after Introductory Words, Phrases and Clauses**
  - First, the lab rat was released into the maze.
  - In the beginning of his term, George Washington suggested that the United States express a neutral foreign policy.
  - When the Supreme Court delivered its decision, the conflict over the 2000 presidential election ended.
- **Items in a Series** Use commas to separate three or more items (words, phrases or clauses) in a series. The comma between the final two items is optional. Use it when necessary to avoid ambiguity.
  - The novel's character embodies patriotism, courage, integrity and fear.
  - They brought milk, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and raspberry cookies.
  - I have gone to Mount Everest, climbed to its peak, and lived to tell the story.
- **Commas Between Adjectives** Put commas between adjectives if they modify the noun rather than each other. Use commas if the adjectives can be rearranged and still make sense.
  - I met a focused, confident, outgoing and ambitious person at the leadership conference.  
[“Focused” does not describe “confident.” “Confident does not describe “ambitious.” Each adjective describes “person” and not each other. If you can add “and” between the adjectives, you can use commas.]
  - He won the award for the best sophomore engineering report.  
[The adjectives work together and should not be separated. “Engineering” describes “report” and “sophomore” describes the “engineering report.” “Best” describes the “sophomore engineering report.”]
- **Commas Around Non-Restrictive Elements** Place commas around non-essential information that can be easily removed from a sentence without changing its meaning. You can use “that” instead of “which” or “who” with restrictive clauses. Commas are not needed.
  - The jurors who voted guilty were harassed by the media.
    - *This sentence stresses that **only** those “who voted guilty” were harassed.*

- The jurors, who voted guilty, were harassed by the media.
  - *This sentence stresses that the entire jury was harassed.*

- **Commas Around Embedded Words and Phrases**

- The investors, moreover, must analyze the business plan for validity.
- The investors, in contrast, must analyze the business plan for validity.
- Chimpanzees, for example, are very vicious mammals.