

**INSTRUCTOR:** Unnecessary commas. The comma is punctuation that separates parts of a sentence. It tells readers to pause briefly and helps them understand the meaning of a sentence. Because commas are used so frequently, writers sometimes use them in places they do not belong. Let's review some situations in which commas should be left out.

A comma is not needed after a coordinating conjunction. There are seven coordinating conjunctions, which can be memorized by using the acronym FANBOYS-- for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. "I have appointments at the dentist, doctor, and hairdresser on Monday." A comma should not come after the coordinating conjunction "and." "Jake could not make it to the party, so he sent his regrets." A comma should not come after the coordinating conjunction "so."

A comma should not be used before a series or list of grammatically similar items. "The most common ice cream flavors are vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry." A comma should not be used after "are" to introduce the list of flavors. "The job requires a very specific experience such as working with the elderly, using accounting software, and managing a kitchen staff." A comma should not be used after "such as" to introduce the list of skills.

A comma should not be used between a subject and a verb. "Penelope and I found an expensive silver bracelet in the restroom." A comma should not be used after the subject "Penelope and I." A comma is not required when a single subject has two verbs. "Shauna finished her lab report and studied for her history test." A comma should not be used to separate the two verbs "finished" and "studied."

Essential elements are also called restrictive elements because they define or clarify a particular word in a sentence. Let's look at this sentence. "The paper that you need to sign is sitting on the desk." The words "that you need to sign" are essential to the meaning of the sentence. They restrict the definition of "the paper" to the one that needs to be signed. Essential elements should not have commas around them.

Remember, to help readers understand the meaning of your sentences, use commas where they are needed but avoid them in places where they do not belong.