

Signpost Punctuation

Pesky Punctuation 1: The Comma



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Signpost Punctuation

- Drivers depend on **road signs** to move them to their destination.
- Readers expect **punctuation** to guide them through a document.



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Signpost Punctuation



- **Signpost punctuation** refers to the punctuation marks that:
 - readers anticipate
 - help readers understand your sentence

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Signpost Punctuation



Use punctuation deliberately to **guide** your reader.

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The Comma

- **Tip:** Have you been told to put a comma where you pause or breathe?
Forget it!
- Know **why** you are inserting or deleting a comma.



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The Comma

- The comma is the most common internal punctuation mark in English.
- It is used in the following **4** ways ...



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The Comma: No. 1

- The comma separates **two main clauses** joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet).
 - ➔ Observant managers notice problems (often before the employees do), **and** good managers react immediately to rectify problems.

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What is a main clause?

Main Clause = Sentence

A sentence can stand alone!

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What is a main clause?

A sentence has:

The cat ate the mouse!

↑
Subject

↑
Verb

↑
Object

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The Comma: No. 1

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Main Clause

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Main Clause

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What if there is no *and*?

- When two sentences run together with only a comma or with no punctuation, you have a **run-on error**.
- Run-ons make it hard for the reader to understand your sentence.



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The Run-On Error

- These are **run-on** sentences because two sentences run together:
 - ➔ Observant managers notice problems (often before the employees do), good managers react immediately to rectify problems.
 - ➔ Observant managers notice problems (often before the employees do) good managers react immediately to rectify problems.

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The Run-On Error

- Fix the run-on with a semicolon or period:
 - ➔ Observant managers notice problems (often before the employees do); good managers react immediately to rectify problems.
 - ➔ Observant managers notice problems (often before the employees do). Good managers react immediately to rectify problems.

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The Comma: No. 2

- The comma separates a **nonessential element** from the main clause.
- Nonessential elements may have useful, important information, but the reader can still understand the sentence without them.
 - ➔ The best employees, those who produce good work on time, are sometimes hard to hire in today's market.

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How do I know it's nonessential?

- You can grab hold of the **handles** (the punctuation) around the nonessential element and pull it out of the sentence ...
 - ➔ The best employees, those who produce good work on time, are sometimes hard to hire in today's market.



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 - ➔ The best employees are sometimes hard to hire in today's market.

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The Comma: No. 3

- The comma separates an **introductory element** from the main clause.
 - ➔ Regardless which service we use, we must have a temp at this desk by Monday morning.

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The Comma: No. 3

- **Exception:**
If the sentence begins with a coordinating conjunction, do not put a comma after the conjunction.



I appreciate your plans for this project, Tom. **But** I want to make sure the project is greenlighted first.

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The Comma: No. 4

- The comma separates **items in a series**.
 - ➔ Good management tells the employee that you are paying attention, that you do care about the employee's contribution to the company, and that you value the employee.

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The Comma: No. 4

- The comma separates **items in a series**.
 - ➔ Good management tells the employee that you are paying attention, that you do care about the employee's contribution to the company, and that you value the employee.

Item 1

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The Comma: No. 4

- The comma separates **items in a series**.
 - ➔ Good management tells the employee that you are paying attention, that you do care about the employee's contribution to the company, and that you value the employee.

Item 2

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The Comma: No. 4

- The comma separates **items in a series**.
 - ➔ Good management tells the employee that you are paying attention, that you do care about the employee's contribution to the company, and that you value the employee.

Item 3

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The Comma: No. 4

- The comma separates **items in a series**.
 - ➔ Good management tells the employee that you are paying attention, that you do care about the employee's contribution to the company, and that you value the employee.

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The serial comma? You decide!

- Should a comma come before the word **and** at the end of a series?
 - It is **always** correct to include the serial comma.
 - But the serial comma **may be omitted** if the series remains **easy to read**.



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The Serial Comma

Difficult to read:

Use the comma before the **and**.

- Good management tells the employee that you are paying attention, that you do care about the employee's contribution to the company, and that you value the employee.

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The Serial Comma

Easy to read:

Use the comma before the **and**.

Or omit the comma before the **and**.

- Be sure to pick up **tape, scissors, and ribbon** on your way to the office!
- Be sure to pick up **tape, scissors and ribbon** on your way to the office!

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The Comma ...



Use punctuation deliberately to **guide** your reader.

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