



Common Mistakes When It Comes to Comma Usage

When it comes to using commas, one should always consider what it is they are attempting to present and convey in their writing. Commas can be used for rhetorical purposes, in addition to their own grammatical guidelines and restrictions. In some areas of writing, comma usage is unique to the voice of the writer, a tool meant to impart emphasis to where the
to be.

Though commas are a common component of the written world, comma usage may be often misused and abused, if incorporated incorrectly. This module will address some of the common errors and mistakes made when using commas.

1. The Comma vs. The Semicolon

When it comes to separating phrases or sentences, both commas and semicolons share some similarities, but they are certainly different. Commonly, commas are used to separate phrases more often than to separate two complete sentences or clauses, which is what a semicolon's primary function is.

A semicolon acts in a way that loosely joins two sentences together, without removing either sentence's independence; for a semicolon to be used, the two clauses must be able to stand on their own while still maintaining some relevance to one another.

Example: James thought he could make it home before midnight; he was wrong.

Example: _____ ; they knew nothing good ever came from there.

5. Coordinate vs. Non-coordinate Adjectives

According to Purdue OWL, coordinate adjectives are adjectives with equal ("co-ordinate") status in describing the noun; neither adjective is subordinate to the other. You can decide if two adjectives in a row are coordinate by asking the following questions:

Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written in reverse order?

Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written with *and* between them?

If you answer yes to these questions, then the adjectives are coordinate and should be separated by a comma. Here are some examples of coordinate and non-coordinate adjectives:

He was a difficult, stubborn child. (coordinate)

They lived in a white frame house. (non-coordinate)

She often wore a gray wool shawl. (non-coordinate)

Your cousin has an easy, happy smile. (coordinate)

The 1) relentless, 2) powerful 3) summer sun beat down on them. (1-2 are coordinate; 2-3 are non-coordinate.)

The 1) relentless, 2) powerful, 3) oppressive sun beat down on them. (Both 1-2 and 2-3 are coordinate.)

References