



COMMAS, SEMI- COLONS, AND COLONS

COMMAS

- Use a comma to separate two independent clauses (complete sentences) that are joined by a FANBOYS word. (FANBOYS is an acronym: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.)

I bought this book, **and** I will read it soon.
Tom wanted a car, **but** he got a bike.

Friendly warning – You must have an independent clause on each side of the FANBOYS word.
I bought this book and will read it soon. (*will read it soon* is not an independent clause.)

- Use a comma with a series of three or more.

The American flag is red, white, and blue.
James prepared for today's exam by studying hard, attending a review session, and memorizing important definitions.

- Use a comma after an introductory element that does not flow smoothly into the sentence.

After looking everywhere, Leo found his car keys in his jacket pocket.
Because Jane is allergic to bees, she must be very careful in the summer.
On top of everything else, the author lied about his age.
Good heavens, who wouldn't want to win the lottery!

- Use a comma to prevent misreading.

Soon after, the committee disbanded without achieving its goal.
The members of the band strutted in, in matching tuxedos and top hats.
Still, liquids are necessary to sustain life.
I always pay my taxes on time, don't you?

- Use two commas to surround non essential information. Non essential information adds interest to the sentence, but its content is not essential to the basic meaning of the sentence.

Teak, which has a beautiful grain, is often used in veneers.
Compare: Woods that have beautiful grains are preferred for veneers.

Mr. Gomez, who lives next door, speaks three languages.
Compare: Mr. Gomez who speaks three languages is an interpreter at the U.N.



- Use two commas to surround contrasting elements and direct address. Use commas to surround appositives—unless the appositive is essential.

The mayor, not the city council, proposed the tax increase.
I think, Doris, that you need to study harder.
Jim's computer, a laptop, was stolen last week.

- Use commas in conventional situations: names, dates, addresses, dialog, and closings and informal openings in letters.

George Small, Jr. was born on April 12, 1971, in a police car.
She lives at 12 Ash Lane, Ames, Iowa.
"When you're at the library," said my father, "please get me two mysteries."
Sincerely yours,
Dear Todd,

SEMICOLONS

- Semicolons can be used—by themselves—to connect two independent clauses.

The thunder boomed; the rain began.
Lynette has a 4.00 GPA; she hopes to get a scholarship.

- Generally, semicolons are followed by a transitional expression, which is followed by a comma.

This book is very old; unfortunately, it is not worth very much.
Tyrone's car gets very poor gas mileage; therefore, he doesn't drive it very often.

Friendly warning—Do not use a semicolon before *for*, *and*, *not*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*. (See first comma rule.)

- Use a semicolon to separate items in a list if any of the items already contain commas.

My teacher has lived in Denver, Colorado; Boise, Idaho; Chicago, Illinois; and San Diego, California.
The company will be represented by Marissa Jones, director of finance; James Lincoln, director of manufacturing; and Ann Jones, director of research.



COLONS

- Use a colon—when it is preceded by a complete sentence to introduce an explanation, example appositive, or list. Colons are also used after the salutation in business letters.

You must do one thing to win the lottery: buy a ticket.

The poem's structure reveals the poet's message: love has changed her life.

You must read my favorite book: *Pride and Prejudice*.

I need more supplies: pencils, pen, paper, and erasers.

Dear Ms. Baker:

- Use a colon to introduce a long quotation.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad Describes Marlow: The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may express it, a sedentary life.

For the most recent comma, semicolon, and colon use in works cited and references, please refer to the library's website <http://www2.lib.udel.edu/ref/virtual/citations.htm>.

