

## Punctuation Power

### Big four comma rules:

1. Insert a comma between an introductory element and the rest of the sentence. An introductory element can be a single word, a phrase, or an entire clause.
  - *Therefore, the study of human society is a potentially valuable source of information about the causes of psychiatric disorder.*
  - *After World War II, the Nuremberg Code was established because of Nazi abuses of experimental subjects.*
  - *Because most longitudinal studies are observational, it has been argued that they may have less power to detect causal relationships than do experiments.*
  - *Drawing on knowledge from other fields to help explain and understand psychological phenomena, psychology tends to be eclectic.*
2. Do NOT insert a comma after the subject of the sentence, even if it is a long phrase.
  - *Statistical surveys are used in psychology for measuring attitudes and traits.*
  - *Criticisms of psychological research often come from perceptions that it is a "soft" science.*
  - *A tool that is often used in mathematical psychology and cognitive psychology to simulate a particular behavior using a computer is computational modeling.*
3. Insert a comma before a coordinating conjunction followed by an independent clause. A coordinating conjunction is a word that joins two grammatically equal elements (e.g. two verbs). They are the FANBOYS: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*. Look for the subjects and verbs in each clause. If you have two subjects and two verbs, insert a comma.
  - *Psychological knowledge is often applied to the treatment of mental health problems, and it is also directed towards understanding human activity.*
  - *The majority of psychologists are involved in some kind of therapeutic role, yet there has been increasing debate about the nature of therapeutic effectiveness.*
  - *Research in comparative psychology sometimes appears to shed light on human behavior, but some attempts to connect the two have been quite controversial.*
4. Do NOT insert a comma before a coordinating conjunction when what follows is not an independent clause. If you have only one subject and two verbs, don't insert a comma.
  - *Skinner's behaviorist interpretation was highly controversial but did not die.*
  - *Many psychologists do scientific research on a wide range of topics related to mental processes and behavior and typically work in university psychology departments or teach in other academic settings.*
  - *Experimental psychological research is conducted under controlled conditions and relies on the application of the scientific method to understand behavior.*

This handout is partially based on Dana Ferris' *Language Power: Tutorials for Writers* (2014).

**The Oxford Comma:**

The Oxford (serial) comma is a comma placed immediately before the coordinating conjunction (usually *and*, *or*, or *nor*) in a series of three or more terms.

*To qualify for this job, you must have a master's degree in international relations, at least three years of work experience, and the ability to speak both Spanish and Portuguese.*

Opinions among writers and editors differ on whether to use the Oxford comma. Using or not using it consistently may likely result in ambiguity.

*To my parents, Ayn Rand and God* (Teresa Nielsen Hayden)

**Run-On Sentences and Comma Splices:**

Failure to separate two independent clauses results in an error known as a run-on sentence. To fix run-on sentences, 1) divide the run-on into two separate sentences; or 2) change the run-on to a compound sentence with a coordinating conjunction, a conjunctive adverb, or a semicolon.

*Cognitive psychology is the branch of psychology that studies problem solving, perception, memory, and learning, this branch of psychology is related to other disciplines including neuroscience and linguistics.*

Failure to use enough punctuation results in a comma splice. To fix a comma splice, 1) divide the comma splice into two separate sentences; or 2) change the comma splice into a compound sentence with either a coordinating conjunction, conjunctive adverb, or a semicolon.

*Psychology encompasses a vast domain it includes many different approaches to the study of mental processes and behavior*

**Parenthetical Expression, Appositives, and Restrictive Clauses:**

If an expression is parenthetical, it can be removed from the sentence, and what remains will still be a complete sentence. Parenthetical expressions must be preceded and followed by a comma (or a period).

An appositive is a phrase that immediately follows a noun and provides more information about that noun. An appositive is not necessary and it can be removed from the sentence; what remains will still be a complete sentence. Appositives must be set off by commas.

Restrictive clauses are phrases that are necessary to establish the specific identity of a noun. They are not set off by commas. Non-restrictive clauses are set off by two commas like appositives.

- *Some seafood, especially swordfish and tilefish, may contain harmful amounts of mercury. (PE)*
- *He won the election, I believe. (PE)*
- *I thought the plan was secret. Everyone, however, seems to know about it. (PE)*
- *July, the seventh month in our calendar, was named after Julius Caesar. (App.)*
- *The house that once occupied this lot was destroyed by fire. (Restr.)*
- *The National Museum of Civilization, Canada's most popular cultural institution, is across from the Parliament Building. (Non-restr.)*

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