

COMMA PUNCTUATION SHEET

By K.H. Koehler & Mary Harris

(References: *The Chicago Manual of Style* & Merriam-Webster Dictionary.)

When to Use Commas:

- Between two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction.

Example: Sherlock walked over to the dead woman to examine her, and John went to talk to a witness.

- In a sentence that starts with a subordinating conjunction.

Example: Although he was nervous, John went over to talk to a witness.

- In a list.

Example: Sherlock's deerstalker is green, red and black.

(Special note: A comma before the conjunction in a list is called an Oxford comma and is optional. Some authors use them. Others do not. In this case, follow the author's preferred style, *unless* the lack of a comma causes confusion.)

- Between coordinate adjectives, but only if they can be joined by *and*, as well as transposed.

Example: Dr. Watson was a small, neat man.

- To emphasize contrast.

Example: London is a beautiful city, despite being extremely overcrowded.

- In conditional sentences.

Example: If you're confused as to how to find 221B Baker Street, ask a policeman.

- With nonessential appositives.

Example: Sherlock's best friend, John, enjoys writing about his adventures.

- With nonessential clauses and phrases.

Example: The Thames, which cuts through most of London, offers many boating adventures.

- In a direct address.

Example: "Watson, the game is afoot!"

- After interjections.

Example: "Oh, you mean to tell me that Sherlock is already on the scene of the crime?"

(Special note: If you chose to add more emphasis to the interjection, you would need to break this sentence into two: "Oh! You mean to tell me that Sherlock is already on the scene of the crime?")

- In numbers over 999.

Example: Over 4,000 people disappear without a trace every year.

(Special note: Commas in any part of a number over 999 are becoming increasingly less popular, so keep an eye on this rules as it may change very soon.)

- With cities, states and provenances.

Example: I live at 100 Internet Land, Anytown, VA, 66241.

- After e.g., i.e., or aka.

Example: Sherlock, aka the Greatest Detective in the World, has now taken the case.

- To introduce dialog.

Example: Dr. Watson said, "Holmes, do you know the answer?"

- With a nonrestrictive clause. If you can take the *which* or *that* clause out and the meaning of the sentence would remain unaltered, then it is nonrestrictive.

Example: John threw his laptop, which was smashed and burned, into the garbage.

(Special note: Restrictive clauses do not use a comma. The laptop that was smashed and burned sat on John's desk.)

When NOT to use commas:

- Don't use commas to separate two subjects (i.e., a compound subject) doing the same thing:

Example: Sherlock Holmes and John Watson are good detectives.

- Don't use a comma to separate the two actions of a subject.

Example: John walked to the bedroom closet and opened the door.

- Don't use a comma between an independent and dependent clause when the independent clause comes first.

Example: Sherlock walked to the bus stop and sat down on the bench to wait.

Special note: The one exception to this rule is when a dependent clause begins with *though*, *although*, *even though*, and *whereas* (and sometimes *while*, but only when it's being used in place of *whereas*), which are adverbs of concession because these set up contrast clauses.

Example: Sherlock walked to the bus stop, and, although he was tired, he didn't sit down on the bench.

- Don't use a comma to separate a subject from its predicate.

Example: John rode the double-decker bus across London.

- Don't use a comma to separate the action verb of the predicate from the rest of the predicate.

Example: What John wanted to do was to save the victim.

- Don't use commas to separate restrictive clauses from the rest of the sentence.

Example: The victim that John wanted to save was already dead.

- Don't use a comma to separate items in a list when you use a conjunction between the elements.

Example: Sherlock wanted to find the perpetrator and confront him and put him in jail.

(Special note: To make this sentence less clunky, break it up with a comma and no conjunction between the first two items on the list: Sherlock wanted to find the perpetrator, confront him, and put him in bed.)

- Don't separate adjectives from the nouns they modify.

Example: John liked his small, neat flat.

- Don't use comma to separate non-coordinate adjectives--coordinate adjectives are equal if they can be used in a different order and still make sense and you can place an *and* between them and the sentence will still make sense.

Example: The two old friends walked to their place of business together.

- Don't use a comma after starting a sentence with *so* if it's an adjective or adverb or represents logical continuity between describing a situation and its logical outcome.

Example: So big is London, you couldn't walk it in one day.

(Special note: *So* needs a comma when it's used as an informal interjection. You can usually tell this because it can be replaced by the word *well*: "So, what shall we do now?"

WRITTEN A BOOK?

KH KOEHLER DESIGN specializes in affordable copyediting, cover design, creative book layouts, and other professional services to make your book shine. We are the only 5-star company to offer one-stop, all-in-one publishing services. Let our experts take you to the next level!

<http://www.khkoehler.net> or khkoehler@yahoo.com