

ELF Workshop - Comma Usage

By Christl Dorsey

Commas can save lives:

Let's eat Mom!

Let's eat, Mom!

A Comma is used ...

1. after introductory words, phrases, or clauses

a) after introductory words:

Yes, we can learn comma rules. Well, let us begin.

b) after adverbs or adverbial phrases:

Unfortunately, it will take a little work. First, I have to explain. Second, you have to practice.

However, I disagree that it is hard. (I, however, disagree. I disagree, however.)

Fortunately for the tutors, we have the best students.

c) after prepositional phrases:

As a result of her hard work, she got an A. For more information, please ask a tutor.

For example, you can practice grammar. In conclusion, it is not difficult.

d) after other introductory phrases:

All things considered, it was a good day.

e) after a time element:

On Monday, the students had to take a test.

In 2014, we moved our office. Nowadays, many people have a smartphone.

f) after an introductory clause which begins with a subordinating conjunction:

Before students write an essay, they should make an outline.

Since we want to learn, we have to study. Even though it is hard work, we do not give up.

g) after infinitive phrases:

To get the work done, they studied for many hours.

2. with beginning and concluding participial phrases

Noticing that the student worked very hard, the instructor gave him extra credit.

The tutor explained the grammar, realizing that the student did not understand it.

Concerned about my car breaking down, I took it to the repair shop.

I rushed to the store, worried that it might close soon.

3. before coordinating conjunctions that join sentences (FANBOYS)

I study hard, for I want to get good grades.

He does not like eggs, nor does he like spinach.

4. with contrasting elements

Your writing should be interesting and informative, not boring.

5. with lists of three or more

I like noodles, tomato sauce, and salad. She got up, had breakfast, and fed the cat.

6. with two or more coordinate adjectives

I have a shiny, blue car. -- She wore a dark blue dress. (dark modifies blue--no comma)

I got twelve red roses. (no comma)

7. with quotations and direct addresses

a) quotations:

Her mother said, "You must study because you have a test tomorrow."

"You must study," her mother said, "because you have a test tomorrow."

"You must study because you have a test tomorrow," said her mother.

b) direct address:

Christl, please help another student. Could you help me, Mike? Let's eat, Mom!

8. with interrupting expressions

a) appositives:

Professor Chen, the ESL program coordinator, instructed the tutors.

b) parenthetical expression:

This is, in my opinion, the correct action to take.

9. with non-identifying (non-restrictive) relative clauses

Christl, who is an amazing tutor, worked very hard. (a name is considered identified; therefore, the corresponding relative clause has to be separated by a comma or commas)

We went to my friend's house, which is located in a beautiful area.

10. with specific dates, cities/countries, and addresses

a) specific dates:

We will have an exam on Monday, March 30, 2015. The seminar is in April 2015. (no comma)

b) cities/countries, and addresses:

I have visited London, England, and Paris, France. Our house is on 345 Beautiful Street, Carlsbad, California.

11. before an afterthought to a sentence, which can begin with "which" or "especially"

The student worked very hard and got an A, which made her tutor very happy.

Most students have to work hard, especially ESL students.

12. before "such as" when the following is non-identifying (non-restrictive)

I like fruit sorbet, such as strawberry, raspberry, and lemon.

I like different kinds of food such as pasta with tomatoes, Thai food, and sushi. (no comma before "such as" because the list identifies the foods I like)

13. to form a tag question: You are coming to the party, aren't you? You are going, right?

14. with numbers over 999: 1,000; 10,000; 100,000; 1,000,000 ... (no comma for years: 2015)

Please read the sentences and add a comma or commas if necessary.

- 1) Palomar College is located on 1140 West Mission Road San Marcos California.
- 2) In 2010 the ESL Tutoring Program was established.
- 3) At first we only had one tutor.
- 4) However now we have eight.
- 5) We are wonderful kind knowledgeable tutors who enjoy teaching our ESL students.
- 6) Professor Chen the director of the ESL Tutoring Center heads our program.
- 7) Our tutors help students from countries such as Mexico Japan and China.
- 8) I assisted a student from Damascus Syria.
- 9) We want our students to succeed.
- 10) We can take walk-ins but we recommend making an appointment.
- 11) To make an appointment students can call or go to either the ESL Tutoring Center or room H-116.
- 12) We can help students with conversation pronunciation grammar reading writing and more.
- 13) Our tutoring sessions are helpful and informative not tedious.
- 14) When students come to our center we ask them to be prepared.
- 15) We expect them to be on time ask questions and bring all relevant materials.
- 16) Most of our students I believe work very hard and their efforts are rewarded with good grades.
- 17) Realizing that the student did not understand the grammar the tutor began to explain it in detail.
- 18) Maria who is a very hardworking student got a good grade.
- 19) "Come early" one of our tutors used to say "and come often!"
- 20) You are taking advantage of this free service aren't you?
- 21) Finals begin on Tuesday May 12 2015.
- 22) Of course our students will be well prepared for them.
- 23) Fortunately we have the kindest students which makes our work even more rewarding.
- 24) For more help please make an appointment.
- 25) Before you come to the ESL Tutoring Center you might call Rosa my colleague and ask "Rosa can I make an appointment?"
- 26) "Yes you can" she might answer.
- 27) To get more information you can visit informative websites such as Purdue University's Online Writing Lab.
- 28) Just google Purdue Owl comma rules.
- 29) I wanted to help you understand and practice comma rules so I created this workshop.
- 30) I hope it was helpful.

Answers from page 3.

- 1) Palomar College is located on 1140 West Mission Road, San Marcos, California. (address)
- 2) In 2010, the ESL Tutoring Program was established. (prepositional phrase--time element)
- 3) At first, we only had one tutor. (prepositional phrase)
- 4) However, now we have eight. (adverb--transition word)
- 5) We are wonderful, kind, knowledgeable tutors who enjoy teaching our ESL students. (coordinate adjectives)
- 6) Professor Chen, the director of the ESL Tutoring Center, heads our program. (appositive)
- 7) Our tutors help students from countries such as Mexico, Japan, and China. (list of 3 or more)
- 8) I assisted a student from Damascus, Syria. (city/country)
- 9) We want our students to succeed. (no comma)
- 10) We can take walk-ins, but we recommend making an appointment. (FANBOYS)
- 11) To make an appointment, students can call or go to either the ESL Tutoring Center or room H-116. (infinitive phrase)
- 12) We can help students with conversation, pronunciation, grammar, reading, writing, and more. (list of 3 or more)
- 13) Our tutoring sessions are helpful and informative, not tedious. (contrasting element)
- 14) When students come to our center, we ask them to be prepared. (subordinating conjunction)
- 15) We expect them to be on time, ask questions, and bring all relevant materials. (list of 3 or more)
- 16) Most of our students, I believe, work very hard, and their efforts are rewarded with good grades. (parenthetical expression; FANBOYS)
- 17) Realizing that the student did not understand the grammar, the tutor began to explain it in detail. (participial phrase)
- 18) Maria, who is a very hardworking student, got a good grade. (non-identifying relative clause)
- 19) "Come early," one of our tutors used to say, "and come often!" (quotation of sentence in 2 parts)
- 20) You are taking advantage of this free service, aren't you? (tag question)
- 21) Finals begin on Tuesday, May 12, 2015. (specific date)
- 22) Of course, our students will be well prepared for them. (prepositional phrase)
- 23) Fortunately, we have the kindest students, which makes our work even more rewarding. (adverb; afterthought)
- 24) For more help, please make an appointment. (prepositional phrase)
- 25) Before you come to the ESL Tutoring Center, you might call Rosa, my colleague, and ask, "Rosa, can I make an appointment? (subordinating conjunction; appositive; before direct quotation; direct address)
- 26) "Yes, you can," she might answer. (introductory word; comma after the end of the quotation because the sentence continues)
- 27) To get more information, you can visit informative websites such as Purdue University's Online Writing Lab. (infinitive phrase)
- 28) Just google Purdue Owl comma rules. (no comma)
- 29) I wanted to help you understand and practice comma rules, so I created this workshop. (FANBOYS)
- 30) I hope it was helpful. (no comma)