Coordinate Adjectives

Coordinate adjectives are two or more adjectives that describe/modify the same noun or pronoun to an equal degree. They can be moved around and placed in different sequences. In addition, and can be placed between coordinate adjectives without creating an awkward sentence. Coordinate adjectives should be separated by a comma. Two or more adjectives that do not have these characteristics are called cumulative adjectives because of the way they build meaning from word to word. A comma should not separate cumulative adjectives.

- The old, worn, yellowed book remains my favorite. [coordinate adjectives]
- Each reader had a unique literary interpretation of the story. [cumulative adjectives]
Items in a Series

A series is a group of three or more words, phrases, or clauses that are equal in structure and value. In other words, all elements of the series must be parallel. A comma should separate each element in a series.

- The proceeds from the sale of the house should be divided equally between Malia, Philip, and Sean. [series of words]
- Cindy looked under the bed, behind the sofa, and in her backpack but still could not find her paycheck. [series of phrases]
- John recently realized that his mother regrets him, his siblings distrust him, his wife resents him, and his children despise him. [series of clauses]

Quotations

Explanatory words are words that introduce direct discourse. Explanatory words should be set off from quotations by commas.

- Toni Morrison states, “I don’t wait to be struck by lightning and don’t need certain slants of light in order to write.”
- “I don’t know anything about inspiration because I don’t know what inspiration is; I’ve heard about it,” proclaims Faulkner, “but I never saw it.”
- “All you need is a room without any particular interruptions,” says John Dos Passos about writing.

Dates & Numbers

Use commas to separate the day from the date and the date from the year; however, when writing only the month and year, do not use a comma. Never separate the month and date with a comma.

Use commas to separate thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions, etc., in whole numbers when numbers have five or more figures.

- Saturday, July 26, 1966
- July 1966
- The streets were empty on Saturday, July 26, 1966, in Britain.
- The BBC reports that 96,924 fans crammed the stadium on 26 July 1966 to witness England’s brightest moment.

Note: Commas are not used with day-month-year sequences.

Transitional, Parenthetical, & Contrast Expressions

Transitional expressions are words that move the reader from one idea to another. Parenthetical expressions are remarks that are not essential to the sentence. Contrast expressions show differences. All of these should be set off from independent clauses by commas.

- For example, the community center provides educational and social activities for youth every weeknight. [transitional expression]
- The meeting, therefore, is postponed until further notice. [transitional expression]
- Similarly, our Web site will utilize Java applications as part of the site entrance. [transitional expression/conjunctive adverb]
- Good food, it seems to me, makes any event more enjoyable. [parenthetical expression]
- We should always live frugally, not just during the lean times. [contrast expression]

Names, Places, & Addresses

Use commas to separate an academic title from a name. Use commas to separate the names of cities and states from each other. Also, use commas to separate all elements of an address except the state and zip code.

- Linus Van Pelt, Ph.D.
- Linus Van Pelt, Ph.D., is known for his theoretical writing on security blankets.
- Tomorrow, he will be traveling to Kansas City, Missouri, to speak.
- Dr. Van Pelt will hold a book signing party at the Writing Lab, 5201 Rockhill Road, Kansas City, Missouri 64110, in celebration of his newest book, Why I Believe in the Great Pumpkin.

Words of Direct Address & Tag Sentences

Words of direct address name the person or group being spoken to and should be set off by a comma. A tag sentence is a sentence that ends with a short statement or question. Tags often show uncertainty. The tag clause should be set off by a comma.

- Gillian, remember to call your granny. [direct address]
- Please raise your glass, friends and family, in a toast to the bride and groom. [direct address]
- The rain should stop soon, I hope. [tag sentence]
- The sky looks clearer, doesn’t it? [tag sentence]