

**The Christ College Writing Center**  
*Common Comma Usage Tip Sheet*

**Commas** are punctuation marks that indicate a pause or transition in a sentence. Commas are used to:

- Separate items in a series
- Set off introductory material
- Separate words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence
- Set off a direct quotation from the rest of the sentence
- Separate two complete thoughts connected by *and, but, for or, nor, so, yet*
- Separate parenthetical expressions

**Comma Usage Examples:**

1. The young woman purchased bread, wine, salt, and fish.
  - *Use a comma to separate items in a list.*
2. When the fire alarm went off for the third time that night, the motel clerk finally called the fire department.
  - *Use a comma to set off introductory material. "When the fire alarm went off for the third time that night," is an introductory phrase, so there needs to be a comma after it to separate it from the sentence. You could take the phrase (and comma) out of the sentence and it would still be a complete sentence.*
3. Chateau Montelena, which is one of the more expensive Northern California wineries, won a gold medal for this year's bottling of Chardonnay.
  - *Use a comma on both sides of words or phrases that interrupt the flow of the sentence. In this case, the separated phrase "which is one of the more expensive Northern California wineries," is modifying "Chateau Montelena".*
4. Sarah screamed, "But I wanted ice cream today!"
  - *Use a comma to set off a direct quotation from the rest of the sentence.*
5. My prom dress looked gorgeous on me, but I still wished I was wearing my old blue jeans.
  - *Use a comma between two complete thoughts connected by and, but, or, nor, etc. In this case, the sentences are connected by but.*
6. These same council members, you may recall, voted themselves a 35 percent pay increase last year.
  - *Use a comma to set off parenthetical expressions. In this case, "you may recall" is a parenthetical expression, so commas are used to separate it from the rest of the sentence. The parenthetical expression could be removed from the sentence and the sentence would still be a complete sentence.*

**For Additional Information:**

- A Writer's Reference: P1-P2, pp 259-273.
- [http://dianahacker.com/bedhandbook6e/subpages/gm\\_menu.asp](http://dianahacker.com/bedhandbook6e/subpages/gm_menu.asp)
  - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/1/>