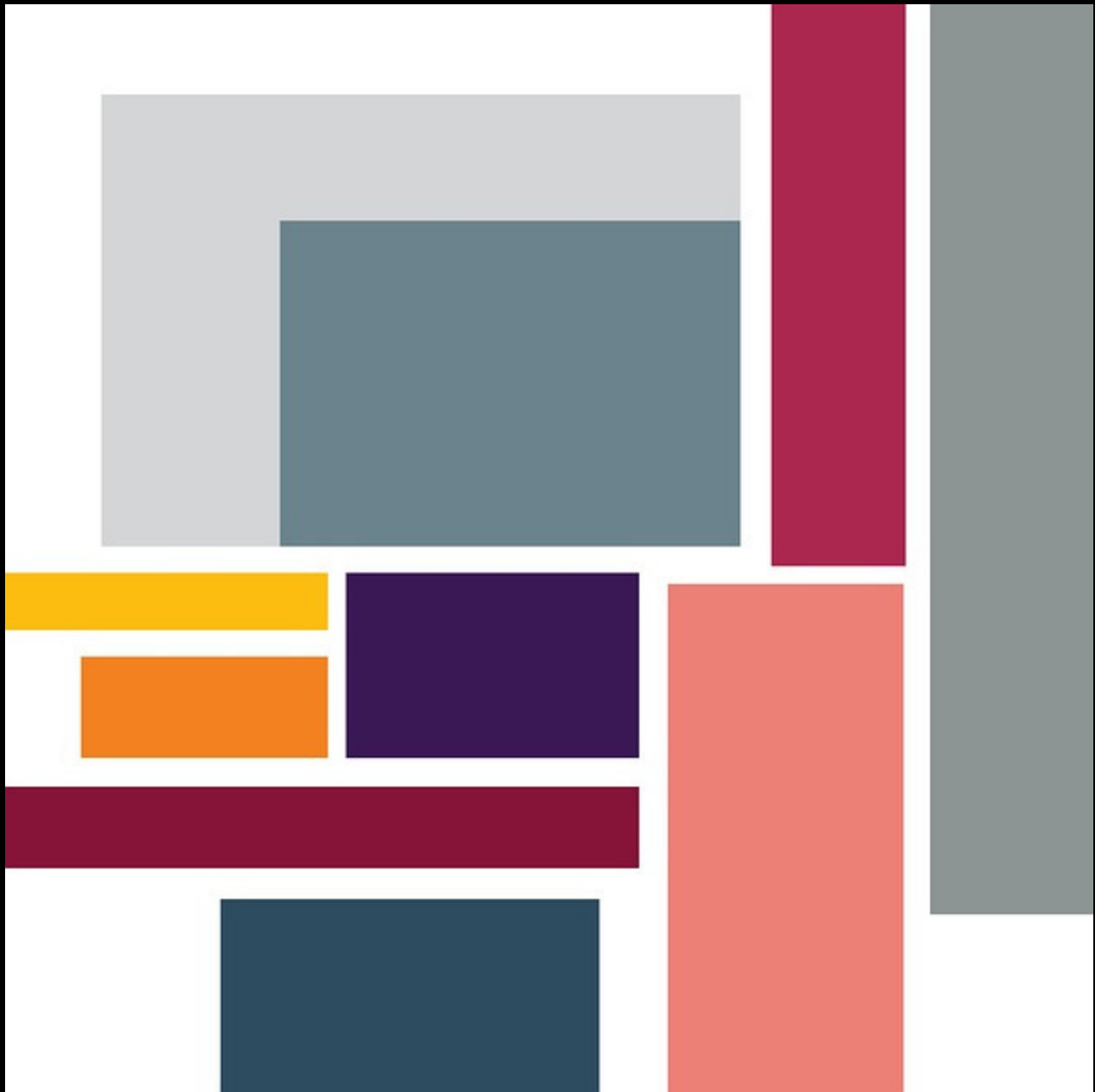


Commas



Commas are used:

A. Before a coordinating (FANBOYS) conjunction, to separate independent clauses

There are seven coordinating conjunctions, known by the acronym FANBOYS:

For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So

FANBOYS conjunctions can be used to join independent clauses (complete sentences), and they must always come after a comma when they are employed in this way.

Note that without a comma, a sentence that uses a FANBOYS conjunction to join two independent clauses is technically a run-on sentence, regardless of how short it is.

Run-on: Some animal species are able to make their own **vitamin C** **but people** lack the enzymes necessary to produce this compound and must obtain it through their diets.

Correct: Some animal species are able to make their own **vitamin C**, **but people** lack the enzymes necessary to produce this compound and must obtain it through their diets.

When the subject is the same in both clauses and is **not** repeated in the second clause, no comma is needed.

Incorrect: People lack the enzymes necessary to produce **vitamin C**, **and must** obtain this compound through their diets.

Correct: People lack the enzymes necessary to produce **vitamin C** **and must** obtain this compound through their diets.

You can also think of the rule this way: *comma + FANBOYS = period*, so plug in a period in place of *comma + and*.

Plug in: People lack the enzymes necessary to produce **vitamin C**. **Must** obtain this compound through their diets.

Clearly, *Must obtain this compound through their diets* is not a sentence, so no comma should be used.

In real life, this rule is somewhat flexible. When a sentence is very long and complex, a comma may in fact be helpful – or even necessary – for the sake of clarity and readability.

Acceptable: Unlike some animal species, human beings are born without the ability to produce the enzyme L-gulonolactone oxidase, **and must** obtain vitamin C through the consumption of foods such as oranges and broccoli.

B. Between a dependent phrase/clause and an independent clause

Unlike independent clauses, dependent clauses cannot stand on their own as complete thoughts.

Dependent elements may take the form of **introductory** words (typically transitions such as *in fact*, *essentially*, *moreover*, or *as a result*) or short phrases.

- Correct: **Initially**, it looked as if the storm was going to miss us by a few hundred miles.
- Correct: **The largest city in the United States**, New York City is a major cultural and financial center.
- Correct: **Rejecting a career in ballet**, Mae Jemison studied engineering and was accepted into NASA's astronaut-training program in 1987.

Dependent clauses frequently begin with **subordinating conjunctions**:

After	Before	Though	Whenever
Although	Despite	Unless	Whereas
As	If	Until	Whether
Because	Since	When	While

When a dependent clause is placed before an independent clause to form a complete sentence, a comma should separate the two clauses.

- Incorrect: Because domesticated canines do not naturally live in pack **structures** **some** scientists scoff at dog-training approaches that require humans to act as pack leaders.

Note that in this version, the two clauses blend into one another. The reader is forced to stop and think about where the division of ideas occurs. In contrast, the comma creates a clear division between the thoughts.

- Correct: Because domesticated canines do not naturally live in pack **structures**, **some** scientists scoff at dog-training approaches that require humans to act as pack leaders.

A dependent phrase or clause that appears after the main clause should typically be set off by a comma as well.

- Correct: Testing animal cognition is **tricky, especially** when species-specific tests are used.
- Correct: Jackie Robinson retired from baseball in **1957, having** become one of the most famous baseball players in the United States.
- Correct: Inuit art was traditionally based on the carving of walrus **ivory, a material** that was once found in abundance.

Note that clauses beginning with *which* should always be set off by a comma.

- Correct: In addition to sketching landscape and nature in his early years, M.C. Escher also drew **insects, which** were featured in a number of his later works.

Comma Exercise 1: FANBOYS and Dependent Elements

Punctuate the following sentences by adding commas as necessary.

1. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was originally intended for an adult audience but today it is widely read as part of the high school curriculum in the United States.
2. Because the Rosetta Stone presented the same text in all three ancient Egyptian scripts it provided the key to the modern understanding of hieroglyphs.
3. Over two million tourists visit Whistler in British Columbia each year primarily for winter sports such as snowboarding and alpine skiing.
4. The average family size in most countries has been steadily decreasing so there are fewer children overall than there used to be.
5. Initially photography's status as an art form was unclear: at the International Exhibition of 1862 organizers debated whether photographs should be shown with the machines or with the paintings.
6. Although paleontologists often find new dinosaur bones or footprints the two types of fossils have not been found together until recently.
7. Ignorance can often be propagated under the guise of balanced debate: for example the synthesis of two opposing views does not always result in a rational conclusion.
8. According to United Nations estimates more than 240 million people live in a country other than in which they were born.
9. In 1858 architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux won the commission to improve and expand Manhattan's Central Park and they began construction on it the same year.
10. The eyes of many predatory animals are designed to enhance depth perception; however they are designed to maximize the field of vision in most other organisms.