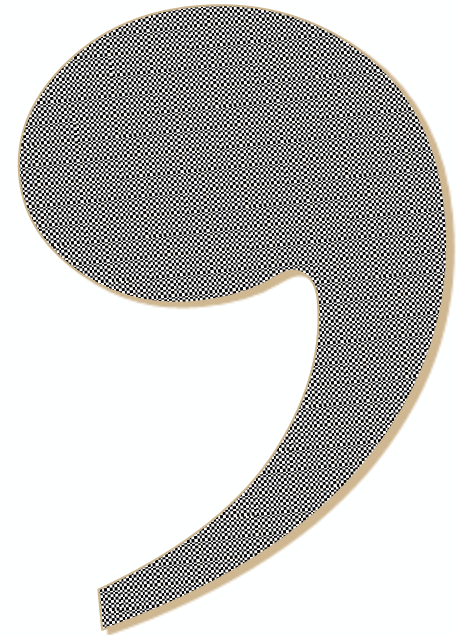


# *Conquering the Comma*

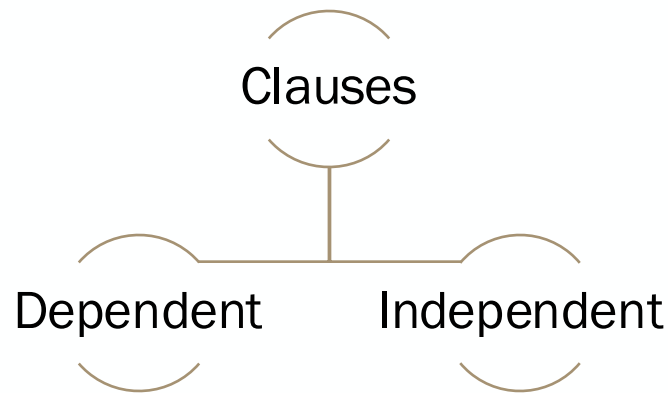
# *What is a Comma?*

- A **comma** is a punctuation mark that indicates a break is needed in a sentence.
- Commas help to clarify meaning for the reader.



# *Clauses and Phrases*

- A **clause** is a group of words that contains both a subject and a verb that complement each other.



- A **phrase** is a group of words that does not contain a subject or a verb that complement each other.

# *Sentence Structure: Independent Clauses*

- A complete sentence has **at least** two components, a **subject** and a **verb**.
- The **subject** and **verb** must form a complete thought to be considered an independent clause.

The couple dances.  
subject (S)      verb (V)

# *Sentence Structure: Compound Sentences*

- **Compound Sentence:** a sentence that contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction.
- A **conjunction** joins words, phrases, and clauses together in a sentence.
- Consider the following acronym to help remember conjunctions:

**For And Nor But Or Yet So**

# *Sentence Structure: Compound Sentences*

- The comma in a compound sentence is placed before the coordinating conjunction.

S      V      Conj.  
Andy built a snowman, and  
S      V  
Jeff played with his dog.

# *Sentence Structure: Compound Sentences*

S      V  
Dan struggled with his homework, so  
S      V  
his father helped him.

# *Sentence Structure: Dependent Phrases*

- A **dependent clause** contains a subject and verb, but the clause cannot stand independently.
- Dependent clauses can often be identified by the use of **dependent clause markers**:
  - Because
  - Since
  - When
  - While
  - Until
  - If
  - As
  - Though
  - Although
  - Unless
  - After
  - Before
  - Once
  - Whether



# *Sentence Structure: Dependent Phrases*

- Dependent phrases and clauses help to clarify and add detail to an independent clause.
- Dependent clauses may appear at the **beginning**, **middle**, or **end** of a sentence.

# *Sentence Structure: Introductory Clauses*

- When a **dependent clause** is placed at the **beginning** of a sentence, place a comma between the independent clause and the dependent clause.

Dep. clause

S

V

Before he took the test, Dan struggled with this

Conj.

S

V

homework, so his father helped him.

# *Introductory Clause*

Where would you place the comma in the following example?

Because it was raining <sup>S</sup> <sup>V</sup> we decided to go to the movies.

Intro Clause                      S              V  
Because it was raining, we decided to go to the movies.

# *Dependent Clauses*

- When a **dependent clause** is located after an independent clause, do not place a comma between the two.

S      V

Dependent Clause

**We** decided to go to the movies **because** we were bored.

# *Essential Phrases and Clauses*

- An **essential clause** or phrase is used to modify a noun. It adds information that is critical to the meaning of the sentence.
- Essential clauses are **not** set off by commas.

S                      essential phrase                      V  
The **people** who work in my office are loud.

# *Essential Phrases and Clauses*

- The word “**that**” is almost always an indicator of an essential phrase or clause.

S                      essential                      V  
The **tiramisu** that I had at Joe’s was great.

# *Non-essential Phrases and Clauses*

A **nonessential clause** or phrase adds extra information to a sentence. This information can be eliminated from the sentence without influencing the meaning of the sentence.

Always place commas around nonessential phrases and clauses.

S                      non-essential                      V

My **brother**, who lives across town, plans to throw a party.

# *Non-essential Phrases and Clauses*

- Use commas to set off additional information:

S      V  
Steve said that he would propose to me on  
non-essential  
Valentine's Day, which is my favorite holiday.



# *Comma Practice*

Would you place commas in the following sentences? If so, where?

- I am planning a trip to Paris which is one of the greatest cities in the world.
- The place that I would most like to see is the Eiffel Tower.
- Pierre, who is one of my business contacts, will meet me at the airport.

# *Sentence Structure: Commas in a Series*

- Place commas in a sentence **to divide items in a list**.
- The commas will help the reader to avoid confusion.
- The comma before the conjunction is generally required, but it can be omitted if there is no possibility of confusion.

# *Sentence Structure: Commas in a Series*

Consider the difference in the following:

- Last month, Alex dated Mary Ann Lee and Kim.
- Last month, Alex dated Mary, Ann, Lee, and Kim.
- Last month, Alex dated Mary Ann, Lee, and Kim.

How many women did Alex date?

# *Sentence Structure: Commas in a Series*

- Commas should be **placed in series of words, phrases, or clauses.**
- Place commas in the following sentences:
  - Martina brushed her hair put on her pajamas and went to bed.
  - She fell asleep and dreamed that she was a princess she kissed a frog and she rescued her prince.

# *Commas with Adjectives*

Use commas to **separate adjectives** that provide an equal description of a noun. The test:

- Can you put “and” between the adjectives?
- Can they be described in reverse order?
- If yes, use a comma.

**Big blue house | Three hungry kittens | A cranky, bald man**

## *A Common Error: The Comma Splice*

# *To Correct a Comma Splice*

Ways to consider correcting

S V Conj. S V  
Dan struggled with his homework, so his father helped him.

S V S V  
Dan struggled with his homework. His father helped him.

S V S V  
Dan struggled with his homework; his father helped him.

# *To Correct a Comma Splice*

How would you correct the following?

1. This semester I am taking calculus physics and economics.
2. Calculus is my best subject, I am certain I will get an A.
3. Although I am very busy, I still find time to have fun.
4. Last weekend my brother visited me and we went to a football game a party and a rock concert.



# *To Correct a Comma Splice*

## Sample Revisions (Not the Only Way!)

- 1. Original:** *This semester I am taking calculus physics and economics.*  
**Possible correction:** *This semester I am taking calculus, physics, and economics.*  
(This adds commas to separate the items in the list for clarity.)
- 2. Original:** *Calculus is my best subject, I am certain I will get an A.*  
**Possible correction:** *Calculus is my best subject, and I am certain I will get an A.*  
(One way to address the comma splice is by adding a coordinating conjunction.)
- 3. Original:** *Although I am very busy, I still find time to have fun.*  
**No correction needed:** This sentence is already grammatically acceptable as is.
- 4. Original:** *Last weekend my brother visited me and we went to a football game a party and a rock concert.*  
**Possible correction:** *Last weekend, my brother visited me, and we went to a football game, a party, and a rock concert.*

# *Thank You*

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