

# How to Effectively Use Commas in Academic Writing (Part 1)

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## Post Url

<https://www.enago.com/academy/comma-usage-in-academic-writing-part-1/>

Comma usage remains one of the most misunderstood concepts in writing. The misconception that a comma can be arbitrarily inserted to denote a pause must be dispensed with. There are specific (and quite stringent) rules that should be adhered to in academic writing. This article will explore these specific rules in detail.

## Use a Comma to Separate Elements in a List

One of the basic uses of a [comma](#) is to segregate items in a list. In American English, a comma (also known as serial comma or Oxford comma) is inserted before the conjunction separating the last item in the list.

Points to remember:

- Commas are used to separate more than two elements in a list
- Use a semi-colon instead of a comma to segregate the list items that have internal commas
- The concluding conjunction may not always be “and”; “or” and “as well as” are also used for this purpose

Example,

*The questionnaire was distributed to the local residents, district bodies, and the neighborhood schools.*

## Introductory Comma

An introductory comma is used after introductory words, phrases, and clauses. These elements introduce a premise which is resolved by the main (independent) clause.

## Introductory Words

Introductory words convey a sense of continuity from one sentence or point of view to the one succeeding it.

Examples of introductory words: *However, moreover, thus, therefore, further, etc.*

Usage in a sentence: *Consequently*, the sample size had to be increased to include the observed anomalies.

## Introductory Phrases and Clauses

Introductory phrases also introduce a concept or thought that is explained/elaborated by the main clause. Introductory phrases do not have a subject or a verb, unlike introductory clauses.

**Introductory phrase:** *On one hand*, grouping students by a response to positive facial expressions allows them to react at their own pace.

**Introductory clause:** *Since zoologists have been trying to interpret how animals communicate*, a new study will attempt to interpret sounds made by various species of mammals.

## FANBOYS Comma

Use a comma to separate two *independent* clauses when they are joined by a *coordinating* conjunction. To help remember these conjunctions, an acronym has been coined.

F – for

A – and

N – nor

B – but (not *because* – this is a subordinating conjunction)

O – or

Y – yet

S – so

Clauses that can convey complete meaning on their own are known as independent clauses. They are joined by appropriate coordinating conjunctions to convey a sense of continuity. Ideally, two independent clauses can be separated by a period and represented as separate sentences; however, transitional words and phrases as well as coordinating conjunctions are used to denote the logical flow of a sentence or an argument.

Examples,

1. *In this study, sensitivity to feedback in classrooms was not considered for the outcome, but it is relevant and should have been taken into account.*
2. *The supply chain of the organizations observed had been significantly affected after the Fukushima disaster, yet they resumed operation shortly after.*

Each of the seven coordinating conjunctions plays a different role in a sentence and must be appropriately used to link the independent clauses.

<b>For</b> provides an explanation.	<b>And</b> joins concepts/elements that are similar or equal. And also provides additional information.	<b>Nor</b> is used for two non-contrasting grammatically negative terms.
<b>But</b> is used to denote a contrast.	<b>Or</b> is used to denote an alternative	<b>Yet</b> is also used to denote contrast
<b>So</b> is used to show the consequence of something		

Source: <http://speakspeak.com/resources/english-grammar-rules/conjunctions/coordinating-so-and-but-or-yet-for-nor>

## Comma Splice

A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are incorrectly separated by a comma instead of being joined by an appropriate conjunction.

For example: *Local residents are complaining about a substantial increase in noise pollution when the development project began, nobody has taken this into consideration.*

Such instances can be resolved by,

- Using a semi-colon to punctuate and separate the two independent clauses: *Local residents are complaining about a substantial increase in noise pollution when the development project began; nobody has taken this into consideration.*
- Using a period to punctuate and separate the two independent clauses: *Local residents are complaining about a substantial increase in noise pollution when the development project began. Nobody has taken this into consideration.*

One of the most prominent uses of a comma is with respect to parenthetical elements. Parenthetical elements are regarded as extra information, that is, a sentence would still convey a comprehensive meaning if such information is omitted. However, parenthetical elements are often best judged contextually, and this will be discussed in detail in [How to Use Commas in Academic Writing \(Part 2\)](#).

### Cite this article

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