

# COMMAS



# SETTING OFF INTRODUCTORY SENTENCE PARTS

- Use a comma to set off:
  - introductory words,
  - phrases, and
  - clausesfrom the main part of a sentence.

# SETTING OFF INTRODUCTORY SENTENCE PARTS

- The comma keeps the reader from accidentally attaching the introductory portion to the main part of the sentence, then having to go back and reread the sentence.

# SETTING OFF INTRODUCTORY SENTENCE PARTS

- In other words, commas following introductory elements will save the reader time and reduce the chances of misinterpreting what is written.

# Introductory Words

- Relieved, I gathered my things and left for the day. No one suspected quiet old me of murder.
  - The comma keeps the reader from accidentally attaching the introductory portion to the main part of the sentence, then having to go back and reread the sentence.

# Introductory Words

- Surprised, I backed into a table. I thought dung smelled bad, but whatever my grandma made smelled even worse.
  - The comma keeps the reader from accidentally attaching the introductory portion to the main part of the sentence, then having to go back and reread the sentence.

# Introductory Words

- Amazed, the doctor revised his patient's medication. Now the poor sap was hearing multiple voices instead of just one.
  - The comma keeps the reader from accidentally attaching the introductory portion to the main part of the sentence, then having to go back and reread the sentence.

# Introductory Phrases

- Hoping for the best, we checked our findings. We had arrived at the rendezvous, but the wheel man was nowhere in sight.
  - The comma keeps the reader from accidentally attaching the introductory portion to the main part of the sentence, then having to go back and reread the sentence.



# Introductory Phrases

- Badly injured in the “accident,” Steve was hospitalized for three months. No one ever messed with the angry bunny again.
  - The comma keeps the reader from accidentally attaching the introductory portion to the main part of the sentence, then having to go back and reread the sentence.

# Introductory Phrases

- Fooled by the pitch, the batter missed the ball.
  - The comma keeps the reader from accidentally attaching the introductory portion to the main part of the sentence, then having to go back and reread the sentence.

# Introductory Clauses

- When we looked more carefully, we located the missing order. Everyone had thought that the request for 10,000 tubas was a joke.
  - The comma keeps the reader from accidentally attaching the introductory portion to the main part of the sentence, then having to go back and reread the sentence.

# Introductory Clauses

- Although the roads were icy, we arrived at work on time. It helps to own a bumper car.
  - The comma keeps the reader from accidentally attaching the introductory portion to the main part of the sentence, then having to go back and reread the sentence.

# Introductory Clauses

- Since we added staff, our workload has eased.  
Now we only scream every five minutes.
  - The comma keeps the reader from accidentally attaching the introductory portion to the main part of the sentence, then having to go back and reread the sentence.

# Dependent Clauses?

- Introductory clauses are dependent clauses, because they cannot stand alone.
- In the previous clause examples, the dependent clause is followed by a comma because it is introducing the rest of the sentence.

# Dependent Clauses?

- If the two parts of each of these sentences were reversed, the sentence would still make sense.
- However, if you reverse the sentence parts, placing the dependent clause at the end, you do *not need a comma.*

# Revised Clauses—no comma

- We located the missing order when we looked more carefully.
- We arrived at work on time although the roads were icy.
- Our workload has eased since we added staff.



# CLARIFYING MEANING

- Commas help the reader to know which words **belong together**.
- Add commas to the following sentences to help make their meaning clear.

# Adding Commas

- Outside the yard was covered with human skin.
- After running the horses returned the humans to the barn.
- During the night time drags on and on.
- As he watched the clock slowly ticked away the seconds before the bomb exploded.

# The sentences should read like this:

- Outside, the yard was covered with human skin.
- After running, the horses returned the humans to the barn.
- During the night, time drags on and on.
- As he watched, the clock slowly ticked away the seconds before the bomb exploded.

# SETTING OFF EXPLAINING PHRASES

- An explaining phrase is a word or group of words that immediately follows a noun or pronoun.
- The phrase makes the noun or pronoun clearer or more definite by explaining or identifying it. (An explaining phrase is also called an appositive.)

# Explaining Phrases

- Mindy Wilcox ordered dinner, **a thick filet with steamed vegetables.**
- Melanie Hicklin, **our company nurse**, will give flu shots tomorrow.
- The keynote speaker is Mary Swenson, **director of the Animal Rescue League.**
  - The phrase makes the noun or pronoun clearer or more definite by explaining or identifying it.

# SETTING OFF EXPLAINING PHRASES

- Sometimes an identifying proper noun will precede or follow a common noun.
- If the proper noun is necessary to identify the person, place, or thing, it is not set off by commas.
- However, if the person can be identified without the proper noun, then the proper noun is surrounded by commas.

# SETTING OFF EXPLAINING PHRASES

- My brother, **David**, farms and ranches in South Dakota.
- The shock rocker **Marilyn Manson** performed at the Civic Center.
- The vice-president, **Al Gore**, visited the flood site.

# SETTING OFF EXPLAINING PHRASES

- Any time information not essential to the meaning of a sentence is added, that information is set off by commas.
- In the first sentence, the presence of commas tells us that the writer has only one brother.
- David is set off by commas because brother is enough information to identify the subject.
- The name David simply adds additional information.
  - My brother, **David**, farms and ranches in South Dakota.



# SETTING OFF EXPLAINING PHRASES

- In the second example, we know that more than one shock rocker exists since the name Marilyn Manson is not set off by commas.
  - The shock rocker **Marilyn Manson** performed at the Civic Center.
- If the proper noun is necessary to identify the person, place, or thing, it is not set off by commas.

# ESSENTIAL CLAUSES

- At the beginning of this lesson, you learned that an introductory dependent clause is followed by a comma, but that, when it is moved to the end of the sentence, no comma is needed.
- In some sentences a dependent clause cannot be omitted without changing the basic meaning of the sentence.

# ESSENTIAL CLAUSES

- Omitting it changes the meaning of the sentence or makes it untrue.
- Such a clause is an *essential clause* (also known as a restrictive clause) and is not set off by commas.

# ESSENTIAL CLAUSES

- All drivers **who have had a drunk driving conviction** should have their licenses revoked.
- All drivers should have their licenses revoked.
  - Omitting it changes the meaning of the sentence or makes it untrue.

# ESSENTIAL CLAUSES

- The highlighted clause is essential because the meaning of the sentence is changed if the clause is removed from the sentence.
- The lack of commas shows that the clause is essential.
  - All drivers **who have had a drunk driving conviction** should have their licenses revoked.

# NONESSENTIAL CLAUSES

- A nonessential clause adds information that is not essential to the basic meaning of the sentence.
- If a nonessential clause is removed, the basic meaning of the sentence is not changed.
- Nonessential clauses (also known as **nonrestrictive** clauses) are set off by commas.

# NONESSENTIAL CLAUSES

- Matt's mother, **who has trouble with directions**, had to ask for help.
- Matt's mother had to ask for help.
  - A nonessential clause adds information that is not essential to the basic meaning of the sentence.

# NONESSENTIAL CLAUSES

- The highlighted clause is nonessential because if it is removed from the sentence, the basic meaning of the sentence is not changed.
- To show that it is nonessential, it is set off by commas.



# NONESSENTIAL CLAUSES

- Nonessential clauses usually begin with one of these words, which are called **subordinate conjunctions** (because they introduce dependent, or subordinate, clauses):
  - *who,*
  - *whom,*
  - *whose,*
  - *which, or*
  - *that.*