

# COMMAS

When a comma is used to set off an element, a second comma is required if the phrase or sentence continues beyond the element being set off.

*Luna lived in Newport News, Virginia, before she moved to Lynchburg.  
Carrie was born on April 17, 1986, in Lynchburg.*

The abbreviations *etc.*, *et al.*, *i.e.*, and *e.g.* should be followed by a comma. (*I.e.* and *e.g.* should only appear in parentheses.)

*Rocky, Luna, etc., like to sit on the couch.*

When a noun is preceded by two or more adjectives that could be joined by *and*, the adjectives are normally separated by commas (hint: if you can remove one of the adjectives without changing the meaning of the sentence, then use a comma). If the adjectives are not coordinate, that is, if one or more of the adjectives is essential to (i.e., forms a unit with) the noun being modified, no commas are used.

*The cross-eyed, orange tabby is named Tonks.  
The small tabby cats are named Ginny and Tonks*

A comma is used to set off names or words used in direct address and informal correspondence.

*Rocky, let's go on a walk.  
Is it time for dinner, Luna, or should we wait?*

A comma usually follows an exclamatory *oh* or *ah* unless it is followed by an exclamation mark or forms part of a phrase (e.g., “oh boy,” “ah yes”).

*Oh, I can't get up; Ginny is in the tent.*

A comma should follow an introductory *yes*, *no*, *well*, and the like, except in certain instances more likely to be encountered in informal prose or dialogue.

*Yes, Tonks' face is ridiculous.  
No you don't, Rocky!*

Commas are not required around *Jr.* and *Sr.*, and they are never used to set off *II*, *III*, and the like when these are used as part of a name.

*Rocky Waller Sr. loves to go on walks.*

Commas are not required around *Inc.*, *Ltd.*, and such as part of a company's name.

*Carrie Waller Creative Inc. was founded in 2012.*

Material quoted in the form of dialogue or from text is traditionally introduced with a comma, but if a quotation is introduced by *that*, *whether*, or a similar conjunction, no comma is needed.

*John said, "What does everybody want for dessert?"  
John said that "dessert is ready."*

When a question is included in a sentence, it should be preceded by a comma.

*I asked myself, how did Luna get that big?*

Introductory phrases should be followed by a comma.

*If Tonks doesn't run enough during the day, she will keep everyone up at night with her shenanigans.*

# SEMICOLONS

A semicolon is most commonly used between two independent clauses not joined by a conjunction to signal a closer connection between them than a period would.

*Tonks is orange; Ginny is brown.*

The adverbs *however, thus, hence, indeed, accordingly, besides, therefore,* and sometimes *then* should be preceded by a semicolon rather than a comma when they are used to join two independent clauses.

*Luna used to be small; however, she has tripled in size since she was a kitten.*

When items in a series themselves contain internal punctuation, separating the items with semicolons can aid clarity.

*Each pet has its own issue: Rocky, the dog, licks his leg; Luna, the black cat, barbers; Ginny, the brown tabby, has a strange affinity for tents; and Tonks is just funny looking.*

# EN DASHES

The en dash is primarily used to indicate a range, connection, or compound pronoun.

*John makes dinner around 4–5pm.  
Carrie and I took the Lynchburg–New York train.  
The Hillcats won 12–1 on Thursday.  
In the pre–Tonks years, Carrie and John had only three pets.*

# EM DASHES

The em dash is used to set off an amplifying or explanatory element, especially when an abrupt break in thought is called for. Em dashes can be used in place of commas, parentheses, or a colon for more impact.

*The cats—all three of them—like John more than Carrie.  
Carrie likes to shop for one thing only—furniture.*

An em dash is occasionally used to set off an introductory noun, or a series of nouns, from a pronoun that introduces the main clause.

*Parker, Josie, Vinny—they all love walks.  
Walks—that's what the dogs love most.*

A question mark or an exclamation point—but never a comma, a colon, or a semicolon, and rarely a period—may precede an em dash.

*Josie found the tennis ball—again!—and brought it into the house.*

# PARENTHESES

Parentheses are stronger than a comma and similar to an em dash.

*The house (they've owned it for years) is on the market.*

## WHO AND WHOM

*Who* and *whoever* indicate the subject of a sentence (the *who* is performing an action); *whom* and *whomever* indicate the object (the *whom* is being acted upon). Hint: if you can answer the sentence using *he*, then the question should use the word *who*; if you can answer the sentence using *him*, then the question should use the word *whom*.

*Who brought the Kong ball inside?* (“He brought the Kong ball inside.”)

*Whom should I take on a walk?* (“I should take him on a walk.”)

## WHICH AND THAT

*That* is used for a clause that provides information essential to the meaning of the sentence (hint: *that* should never be used in a clause set off by commas); *which* is used for a non-essential clause (hint: *which* is usually used for a phrase set off by commas).

*The house that Carrie decorated is featured in BHG magazine.*

*The house, which Carrie decorated herself, is featured in BHG magazine.*

## LAY AND LIE

*Lay* (past tense, *laid*) should be used in a sentence containing both a subject and an object; *lie* (past tense, *lied*) should be used when there is no object.

*Josie laid the Kong down at my feet.* (The Kong is the object.)

*Parker likes to lie by the fire.* (Parker does not lay anything down.)

## MAY AND MIGHT

*May* expresses what is possible, is factual, or could be factual; *might* suggests something that is uncertain, hypothetical, or contrary to fact.

*I may have taken Rocky on a walk, but I don't remember.*

*I might have taken Rocky on a walk if he hadn't misbehaved earlier today.*

## WHETHER AND IF

*Whether* expresses a condition where there are two or more alternatives; *if* expresses a condition where there are no alternatives.

*I don't know whether Parker or Josie is outside; I just saw a black dog.*

*I don't know if Josie is outside; I haven't seen her in here.*

## FEWER AND LESS

*Fewer* is used to describe quantifiable situations; *less* is used for hypothetical quantities.

*We have no fewer than ten Kong balls.*

*Josie is less happy when there are no Kong balls outside.*

## FURTHER AND FARTHER

*Further* describes abstract lengths; *farther* describes a measurable distance.

*Luna's barbering may be indicative of further issues.*

*I wonder if Luna and Ginny can see farther than Tonks because their eyes aren't crossed.*

## SINCE AND BECAUSE

*Since* refers to time; *because* refers to causation.

*Since we got Tonks, Luna has been acting jealous.*

*Because Tonks has crossed eyes, she looks funny.*

## BRING AND TAKE

If an object is being moved toward the subject, use *bring*; if it is being moved away, use *take*.

*I will take Parker to the park tomorrow.*

*I will bring Parker home afterwards.*

## ABBREVIATIONS

(Note: a comma always follows these abbreviations unless they end a sentence. *I.e.* and *e.g.* should only occur within parentheses.)

I.E. means “that is,” “in other words”

*Not all of my nieces are as lovely as Luna (i.e., Tonks), but I love them all anyway.*

E.G. means “for example,” “for instance”

*The tabbies (e.g., Ginny and Tonks) have differing opinions of Rocky.*

ETC. means “and the others,” “and other things,” “and the rest”

*Parker, Josie, etc., love to lie by the fire and sleep.*

ET AL. means “and others”

*I love coming home and being greeted by Luna et al.*

## POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

When two people jointly own or control something, the pronouns used to indicate each person should work on its own.

*Carrie's and my trip to Williamsburg was a success.* (“Carrie's trip,” “My trip”)

## SHORTCUTS

© option + g

® option + r

— shift + option + hyphen

– option + hyphen