

Conventions and Presentation

Editing Level 1: Conventions

Readers Need a Comma Break

Do you like pizza, tacos, burgers, fried rice, or all four? If that question makes you hungry, we apologize.

The answer doesn't matter, by the way. We just wanted to show off two uses for the comma, a very handy punctuation tool for organizing words within a sentence. Look at those first two sentences again. Can you describe one use for the comma—or both?

You've been using commas for a long time now, both when you write and when you speak. In fact, you've probably internalized many comma rules without even knowing it. The word *internalized* means you use them without even thinking about it, even if you couldn't recite the rule.

With this lesson, we're going to focus on the following two uses of the comma.

- Commas in a series
- Commas after an introductory clause (or introduction)

We used them both ways in the first two sentences of this introduction! We'll also focus on one specific way never to use a comma. (More on that later.)

A Warm-Up

Before we get into editing, let's look at the wide range of ways writers use commas. Choose a book to browse through. It can be anything except poetry. (Poets are sometimes free spirits when it comes to commas.) Find one sentence with a comma that you could share with your writing circle.

Write down the book title and author. Then write the sentence with the comma or commas on the lines below. Circle one of the commas. Make a guess about why the writer used it. What purpose does it serve? What does it tell the reader about reading the sentence?

Book Title: _____

Model Sentence:

My thoughts about what this comma shows:

Quick Question

If you wanted to find out more about commas and how to use them in your writing, where could you look for help—specifically? List three sources:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Share and Compare

Share your sentence and your thoughts about the rule with your writing circle. If you're not sure about a rule, look at one of the sources you identified for help.

Three Important Comma Rules

Now let's focus on just three rules. These are simple, but very important.

Rule 1

- Use a comma after an introductory clause or phrase.

Examples

If you want your dog to learn to fetch, you have to practice a little every day.

Although it has been raining, I still want to ride my bike to school.

Got the idea? Use a caret to insert commas in the following three sentences.

1. Once you put down your homework it's hard to pick it up again.
2. When someone writes you a note or email be sure you respond.
3. If I pass the next math test I'm going to celebrate.

Rule 2

- Use commas to separate items (words, clauses, or phrases) in a series.

Examples

On my taco I like beans, cheese, lettuce, and plenty of hot sauce.

Next summer I plan to visit my uncle's farm, play with my dog, read at least three books, and run five miles a day.

Got the idea? Then use carets to insert commas into the following sentences.

1. My favorite subjects to study are math art music and drama.
2. Of all the animals at the zoo, the most interesting are the gorillas cheetahs kangaroos and giraffes.

3. If you can sing play an instrument dance or do an animal act you can be in our circus.

Rule 3

- Never, EVER put a comma between the subject and verb.

Incorrect Examples

Ralph, shot the ball and scored a point. (That comma should NOT be there.)

All five of us, love movies. (That comma should NOT be there either.)

Got the idea? Use delete marks to take out commas that do not belong:

1. Wanda, ran 14 miles; then she, leaped for joy.
2. The 16 puppies, tore through the house.
3. Geography, is my hardest subject.

Share and Compare

Compare your editing with your partner's. Did you add commas in the same spots? Did you both delete ALL the commas in the third section? Review the sentences with your teacher and ask questions about anything that is unclear.

Reading, Editing, and Checking

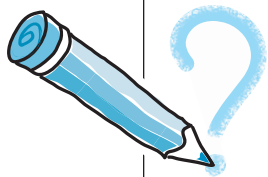
Following is an example of student writing. This writer was a bit uncertain about comma usage. She added commas that don't belong and left out commas she needed.

Before editing, read the passage aloud to get a feel for it. Then, with your pencil in hand, read again. Insert commas that are needed, and delete commas that should not be there. If you get stuck, look back at Rule 1, Rule 2, and Rule 3.

Whenever we have an all-school party my friends and I end up getting mad. There's always lots of good food music and games. Plus all of my friends, show up. Then the DJ, plays a slow song. As soon as the slow song starts the boys I'd like to dance with run from the room like it's on fire. Most of the boys, hate slow music. They could be shy self-conscious or a little unsure about their dancing skills. It, is hard to say. When they play a fast song everyone dances together in a big group. That way no one feels in the spotlight. I, love to group dance. My favorites are group dancing line dancing and Irish folk dancing. At the last dance I kept my eye on Jeron Drew and Christopher. I, kept hoping one of them would ask me to dance. Sorry to say not one of them, did. When the next dance comes around I, think I'll ask one of them! That, could be funny!

Share and Compare

Compare your editing with your partner's. Did you add and delete the same commas? Coach your teacher as he or she goes through the passage with you. Ask questions about anything that is unclear.



A Writer's Questions

Not all writing handbooks agree on comma rules. Why do you think this is? What is the primary reason for using punctuation anyway—is it about more than following rules? If you are making a very important point, would it be OK to bend the rules and put in an extra comma just to slow the reader down?

Editing Level 2: Presentation

A Recipe for Clarity

Do you like to cook? Even if you've never tried it, have you ever browsed through a cookbook just for fun? If so, you may have noticed that a good recipe is a masterpiece of organization. It has two main parts: (1) the big picture (which is vital if you do NOT cook and have never seen quiche Lorraine, for example) and (2) step-by-step instructions telling you just what to do. Good recipes have other important features, too, and you'll have a chance to make note of them in the next section.

A Warm-Up

Your teacher has collected a few recipes for you to look at. As you review each one, think about the key features that make this recipe style presentation work well. Are there some recipes you could follow yourself, even if you were all alone in the kitchen?

With your partner or in your writing circle, jot down some features that make at least some of the recipes especially easy to follow. Be thinking about how you could use those features in other sets of directions, too (not just recipes).

Features for Easy-to-Follow Directions

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

You Be the Judge

The organizational structure of a recipe (big picture + steps) can work beautifully for any writing in which the purpose is to teach or provide directions. Look at the following two examples. Use what you learned in reviewing the recipes to give each example your best critique. With a partner or writing circle, offer specific suggestions for improvement. Make notes right on the copy to help you.

Example 1

Brushing Your Way to Healthy Teeth

Everyone knows that clean teeth are important and can lead to improved overall health. No one wants plaque or gingivitis. A healthy mouth means you will be able to eat the foods that are good for you, and you will feel like smiling when you pose for pictures. To have healthy teeth, you need to know how to brush. Follow these steps: 1. Brush properly at least twice a day. 2. Spend time on all your teeth, not just those big front ones. 3. Don't forget to brush your tongue,

too. Taking the fuzz off your tongue will remove bacteria and keep your breath fresh. 4. Squeeze a pea-sized amount of toothpaste onto a soft-bristled toothbrush. When you brush, use short, up and down motions or back-and-forth motions. 5. Rinse well, with water, dental rinse, or mouthwash.



Example of brushing

Our group recommends these changes:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Example 2

Straight Down the Fairway—Easy As 1, 2, 3

You've got all that beautiful, **carefully maintained grass** stretching out in front of you as you prepare to tee off. But that's the last you will see of it, because you just hit your ball into the trees, again. It might be impossible to hit the ball straight every single time, but by following a few easy steps, you can drastically reduce the number of times you have to go searching for your ball in the woods or **chin-high grass**. If you want to become that golfer who spends most of the time in **manicured short grass**, then follow these simple tips.

Step One

- Maintain a good posture
- Upright stance
- Left shoulder up, right shoulder down
- Don't stoop
- Can you see the ball? Where are you looking?

Steps Two, Three, and Four

To make sure that your beginning position is similar to where you want to be when you strike the ball, make sure your **RIGHT ARM** is touching your **STOMACH** on the right side when you are in your upright stance. Think about your swing plane—make sure you are going for your **TARGET** in a straight line. Tip: Turn your **HEAD** to the right, maybe two or three degrees.

Step 5

See the ball with your left. Be sure the club is in a good position. Concentrate on a smooth takeaway and backswing. Take your normal swing.

You should be amazed by the results. You have just removed most of your back-country adventuring from your round. Fore!



Some Important Things to Know About Golf

Our group recommends these changes:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Share and Compare

Discuss your critiques with the whole class. Were the directions on tooth brushing easy to follow? How about the directions for improving your golf game?



A Writer's Questions

As you may know, some people are visual learners, some are auditory (listening), others are more kinesthetic (hands-on), and there are many who learn best with a combination of approaches. What works best for you? How would knowing the learning styles of your audience help you with the kind of presentation you just worked on?

Presentation Matters

For this part of the lesson, you will work with your writing circle to create recipe-style instructions for doing a task or achieving a goal you know quite a lot about. Imagine that your article will be printed in the local paper or your school paper. It will be read by students your age as well as by adults.

Choose any how-to topic of your own or use our list to help you think of one. We recommend choosing your own topic, something you know so well that you will not need to do extensive research. Following are some suggestions in case you cannot think of a topic on your own.

★ Our own idea: _____

- Middle school survival guide
- Earning extra cash for the stuff you want
- Shooting a free throw
- Making the world's best pizza
- Making a good impression on someone you like or admire
- Performing any skateboard trick (or other physical feat)

In setting up your project, begin by deciding who will do what. Some tasks you can work on together, but you may wish to assign others to individuals. Maybe some team members are especially good at art or editing, for example. Your final directions should include all of the following key elements.

- A big picture summary paragraph—the project or goal in a nutshell
- Clear, manageable steps (try to limit the number to five)
- Concise writing that makes each step easy to follow and quick to do
- Appropriate graphics that let the reader see the project, step by step
- Good font and design choices that make reading easy

If you have computer access, by all means create your project online. Be sure to include a copyright (©) symbol to claim ownership of your own work. And give full credit for anything you borrow or sources you cite. Do not include copyrighted material without permission.