

Punctuation Power

Big four comma rules:

1. Insert a comma between an introductory element and the rest of the sentence. An introductory element can be a single word, a phrase, or an entire clause.
 - *Therefore, the study of human society is a potentially valuable source of information about the causes of psychiatric disorder.*
 - *After World War II, the Nuremberg Code was established because of Nazi abuses of experimental subjects.*
 - *Because most longitudinal studies are observational, it has been argued that they may have less power to detect causal relationships than do experiments.*
 - *Drawing on knowledge from other fields to help explain and understand psychological phenomena, psychology tends to be eclectic.*
2. Do NOT insert a comma after the subject of the sentence, even if it is a long phrase.
 - *Statistical surveys are used in psychology for measuring attitudes and traits.*
 - *Criticisms of psychological research often come from perceptions that it is a "soft" science.*
 - *A tool that is often used in mathematical psychology and cognitive psychology to simulate a particular behavior using a computer is computational modeling.*
3. Insert a comma before a coordinating conjunction followed by an independent clause. A coordinating conjunction is a word that joins two grammatically equal elements (e.g. two verbs). They are the FANBOYS: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*. Look for the subjects and verbs in each clause. If you have two subjects and two verbs, insert a comma.
 - *Psychological knowledge is often applied to the treatment of mental health problems, and it is also directed towards understanding human activity.*
 - *The majority of psychologists are involved in some kind of therapeutic role, yet there has been increasing debate about the nature of therapeutic effectiveness.*
 - *Research in comparative psychology sometimes appears to shed light on human behavior, but some attempts to connect the two have been quite controversial.*
4. Do NOT insert a comma before a coordinating conjunction when what follows is not an independent clause. If you have only one subject and two verbs, don't insert a comma.
 - *Skinner's behaviorist interpretation was highly controversial but did not die.*
 - *Many psychologists do scientific research on a wide range of topics related to mental processes and behavior and typically work in university psychology departments or teach in other academic settings.*
 - *Experimental psychological research is conducted under controlled conditions and relies on the application of the scientific method to understand behavior.*

This handout is partially based on Dana Ferris' *Language Power: Tutorials for Writers* (2014).

The Oxford Comma:

The Oxford (serial) comma is a comma placed immediately before the coordinating conjunction (usually *and*, *or*, or *nor*) in a series of three or more terms.

To qualify for this job, you must have a master's degree in international relations, at least three years of work experience, and the ability to speak both Spanish and Portuguese.

Opinions among writers and editors differ on whether to use the Oxford comma. Using or not using it consistently may likely result in ambiguity.

To my parents, Ayn Rand and God (Teresa Nielsen Hayden)

Run-On Sentences and Comma Splices:

Failure to separate two independent clauses results in an error known as a run-on sentence. To fix run-on sentences, 1) divide the run-on into two separate sentences; or 2) change the run-on to a compound sentence with a coordinating conjunction, a conjunctive adverb, or a semicolon.

Cognitive psychology is the branch of psychology that studies problem solving, perception, memory, and learning, this branch of psychology is related to other disciplines including neuroscience and linguistics.

Failure to use enough punctuation results in a comma splice. To fix a comma splice, 1) divide the comma splice into two separate sentences; or 2) change the comma splice into a compound sentence with either a coordinating conjunction, conjunctive adverb, or a semicolon.

Psychology encompasses a vast domain it includes many different approaches to the study of mental processes and behavior

Parenthetical Expression, Appositives, and Restrictive Clauses:

If an expression is parenthetical, it can be removed from the sentence, and what remains will still be a complete sentence. Parenthetical expressions must be preceded and followed by a comma (or a period).

An appositive is a phrase that immediately follows a noun and provides more information about that noun. An appositive is not necessary and it can be removed from the sentence; what remains will still be a complete sentence. Appositives must be set off by commas.

Restrictive clauses are phrases that are necessary to establish the specific identity of a noun. They are not set off by commas. Non-restrictive clauses are set off by two commas like appositives.

- *Some seafood, especially swordfish and tilefish, may contain harmful amounts of mercury. (PE)*
- *He won the election, I believe. (PE)*
- *I thought the plan was secret. Everyone, however, seems to know about it. (PE)*
- *July, the seventh month in our calendar, was named after Julius Caesar. (App.)*
- *The house that once occupied this lot was destroyed by fire. (Restr.)*
- *The National Museum of Civilization, Canada's most popular cultural institution, is across from the Parliament Building. (Non-restr.)*

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