USE A COMMA TO...

1. **Separate independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction**

   Coordinating conjunctions:  **F A N B O Y S**
   
   Independent clause: A group of words with a subject and a verb that expresses a complete idea (can be a sentence on its own)
   
   Example: I went to the store.
   
   Example: We are studying for the ACT.
   
   When you join two independent clauses (like those above) with a FANBOYS (coordinating) conjunction, **place a comma before the conjunction.**
   
   Example: I went to the store, and I bought cheese.
   
   Example: We will do well on the ACT, for we are studying the rules.

2. **Separate items in a series**

   A series is a list of items.
   
   Example: I bought cheese, bread, and meat for my sandwiches.
   
   Example: We went to the store, bought cheese, and hurried home before dinner.

3. **Separate two or more adjectives modifying the same noun.**

   This is different from hyphenated adjectives before a noun (which we discussed last week).
   
   Hyphenated: She is a well-dressed lady. (Here, the adjectives are functioning as one, acting together rather than individually).
If you “stack” adjectives before a noun, and those adjectives all modify the noun individually, then use commas to separate the adjectives.

Another way of looking at this is if you can place the word and between the adjectives, you need to separate them with commas.

- Example: I gazed up at the bright, shining stars.
- Example: The beautiful, yellow flowers caught my eye.

4. Set off nonrestrictive phrases and clauses from the rest of the sentence.

This basically means you need to use commas to indicate unnecessary information—information that is added to the sentence, but does not have to be there for the reader to understand what the sentence is saying.

Think of the commas in this case as setting off information that could be “lifted” out of the sentence.

- Example: Janet, who is my neighbor, loves the color purple.
- Example: His shoes, which he bought at Macy’s, set him back fifty dollars.

5. Set off an appositive.

Appositives are nouns used to describe other nouns, placed right next to the nouns they describe.

Appositives should be set off by commas. That is, there should be commas on both sides of the appositive phrase.

- Example: Mrs. Sikora, my teacher, likes to read.
- Example: The novel, a story about a teenager from Brooklyn, is one of my favorites.
6. **Set off words of direct address.**

*Direct address* just means directly addressing someone by name.

When you directly address somebody by name, you place a comma after the name (if the name is at the beginning of the sentence), before the name (if the name is at the end of the sentence), or around the name (if the name is in the middle of the sentence).

Example: Joe, please bring your book to class.
Example: Excuse me, Beth, but aren’t you late for the ACT class?
Example: Will you pass the potatoes, Uncle Phil?

DO NOT USE A COMMA...

1. **Between a subject and its verb.**

   **WRONG:** The retiring teacher, was applauded by the crowd.
   **RIGHT:** The retiring teacher was applauded by the crowd.

2. **Before a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS) that separates an independent clause and a dependent clause.**

   In order to use a comma before a FANBOYS conjunction, you MUST have a subject and a verb on both sides of the conjunction. It’s like an equation, where both sides have to have a subject and a verb to be equal.

   **WRONG:** I went to the store, and bought cheese.
   **RIGHT:** I went to the store, and I bought cheese.
   **RIGHT:** I went to the store and bought cheese.

   **WRONG:** We forgot our books, but studied anyway.
   **RIGHT:** We forgot our books, but we studied anyway.
   **RIGHT:** We forgot our books but studied anyway.
3. **To set off essential elements.**
Parts of a sentence that are essential should NOT be set off by commas.

You need to be able to recognize what information is necessary for the meaning of the sentence to be clear.

Often, essential phrases/clauses will begin with the word *that*.

Also, you do not need to use commas when a prepositional phrase modifies a noun right next to it. (Prepositions are words such as *on, in, under, over, between, next to, around, etc.*)

- **WRONG:** Cars, that do not pass fuel emissions tests, should be taken off the roads.
- **RIGHT:** Cars that do not pass fuel emissions tests should be taken off the roads.
- **WRONG:** Students, who do not pass the test, will need to take a re-test.
- **RIGHT:** Students who do not pass the test will need to take a re-test.
- **WRONG:** The book, on the desk, is mine.
- **RIGHT:** The book on the desk is mine.
- **WRONG** (using prepositional phrase):
- **RIGHT** (using prepositional phrase):

4. **To separate two independent clauses without a conjunction.** This is also called a “comma splice”.

Basically, this means you are using a comma where a period or semicolon should occur. Commas cannot separate independent clauses unless a FANBOYS conjunction is included.

- **WRONG:** We went to the store, we bought cheese.
- **RIGHT:** We went to the store, and we bought cheese.
- **RIGHT:** We went to the store. We bought cheese.
- **RIGHT:** We went to the store; we bought cheese.

Examples of comma questions on Practice Test 0861D:
#6, #16, #29, #35, #38, #40, #50, #54, #59, #60, #61, #66, #74,
USE A SEMICOLON TO...

1. **Separate related independent clauses that are not joined by a coordinating conjunction.**
   
   Example: We went to the store; we bought cheese.
   
   Example: He stayed up too late last night; he is overly tired today.

2. **Separate independent clauses joined by a transitional word (conjunctive adverb).**
   
   Formula: Independent clause—semicolon—transitional word—comma— independent clause

   Conjunctive adverbs: however, therefore, also, meanwhile, indeed, furthermore, thus

   *However* and *therefore* are the ones you will see most often on the ACT.

   Example: I didn’t eat my vegetables; therefore, I was grounded for the weekend.
   
   Example: I forgot to study for the test; however, I did quite well.

3. **Separate items in a series when the items themselves have commas within them.**
   
   Example: The class was composed of Mary, who is a lacrosse player; Jim, who likes video games; and Farah, who just moved to Illinois.
   
   Example: We will travel to Austin, Texas; Boston, Massachusetts; and Cincinnati, Ohio.
DO NOT USE A SEMICOLON...

1. **To separate a dependent and independent clause.**
   
   **WRONG:** I did well on the test; because of my intense studying.
   
   **RIGHT:** I did well on the test because of my intense studying.
   
   **WRONG:** We went to the store; because bought cheese.

Examples of semicolon questions on Practice Test 0861D:

#38, #40, #54, #60, #74