

COMMAS

A comma is used to mark a brief pause, much shorter than a pause made by a full stop. It can be used to separate two words, or groups of words, in a sentence, to make the meaning clear.

EXAMPLE A

- We will need pots, pans and spoons.
- Mr. Green is a kind, gentle man.
- She stopped, stared and ran.
- I like green, red, blue, yellow and pink.
- Tom scares the cat, teases the dog, bullies his brother and annoys his sister.

Commas are the most common used punctuation mark, but you have to be careful how you use them. You can easily change the meaning of a sentence by moving a comma to a different place or taking it away altogether.

EXAMPLE B

- We ate chocolate, jelly and cake.
- We ate chocolate jelly and cake.

The comma is missing in example 2. This makes it sound as though the jelly was made of chocolate.

USE COMMAS

To show a pause inside a sentence.

To separate the items on a list.

To separate inessential words or phrases from the rest of a sentence.

To break up numbers into thousands.

When writing a date.

When opening and closing letters. (Dear John, ... Kindest Regards, ...)

DON'T USE COMMAS

Don't use too many commas.

If a sentence is broken by commas in too many places it makes it harder, instead of easier, to understand.

Don't break up a list of adjectives (these describe nouns or pronouns) by commas, if they sound better without pauses.

Commas are not generally used with the word *"and"*.

In a list *"and"* tends to replace the comma, but sometimes you need to use a comma before *"and"* to make the meaning clearer.

The best yachts in the race were Seawave, Starlight, Miss Lola, and Thunder and Lightning.

- Without the comma you might think that Miss Lola and Thunder was one yacht and Lightning another.

