



Scientific  
Publications

Webinar:

# Comma Basics

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# What we will cover

- Guidelines for comma use
- Examples of correct and incorrect comma use
- Resources

# What commas do

- Commas can help organize information in a sentence
- Commas can set off information that is not essential to the meaning of a sentence
- Commas can help clarify your meaning

# Use a comma to set off introductory elements

**Over the past decade,** the incidence of HPV-related oropharyngeal cancers increased dramatically.

# Use a comma to set off introductory elements

Over the past decade, the incidence of HPV-related oropharyngeal cancers increased dramatically. **However**, the incidence of tobacco-related oropharyngeal cancers has declined.

# Use a comma to set off introductory elements

**If the patient's pain does not improve,**  
palliative surgery should be considered.

# Use commas to set off nonessential words, phrases, and clauses

The leading risk factor for non–small cell lung cancer, **the most common type of lung cancer**, is smoking.

The leading risk factor for non–small cell lung cancer is smoking.

Smoking is the leading risk factor for non–small cell lung cancer, **the most common type of lung cancer**.

# Use commas to set off nonessential words, phrases, and clauses

Patient 2, **who had no family history of breast cancer**, presented with a palpable lump in her left breast.

Patient 2 presented with a palpable lump in her left breast.



# Use commas to set off nonessential words, phrases, and clauses

But: Do not use commas to set off essential information.

Patients **who have a history of heart disease** are not eligible for this study.

 Patients are not eligible for this study.

# Use commas to set off nonessential words, phrases, and clauses

Such tumors should be treated with radiation,  
**not chemotherapy.**

Such tumors should be treated with radiation.

# Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining 2 independent clauses

The patient's condition improved, **and** she was discharged the following day.

The patient's condition improved. She was discharged the following day.

# Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining 2 independent clauses

## Coordinating conjunctions:

- and
- but
- or
- for
- nor
- so
- yet

# Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining 2 independent clauses

The molecule has demonstrated activity against cancer cell lines, **but** it has not yet been tested in vivo.

The molecule has demonstrated activity against cancer cell lines. It has not yet been tested in vivo.


# Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining 2 independent clauses

The molecule has demonstrated activity against cancer cell lines, but **it** has not yet been tested in vivo.

The molecule has demonstrated activity against cancer cell lines but has not yet been tested in vivo.

# Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining 2 independent clauses

But: Use a semicolon to join independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction.

 The molecule has demonstrated activity against cancer cell lines, **however**, it has not yet been tested in vivo.

The molecule has demonstrated activity against cancer cell lines; **however**, it has not yet been tested in vivo.

# Use commas to separate 3 or more items in a series

The FOLFOX regimen comprises leucovorin, 5-fluorouracil, and oxaliplatin.



# Use commas to separate 3 or more items in a series

I attended the banquet with **my parents, Brad Pitt, and Angelina Jolie.**


I attended the banquet with my parents, **Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.**

# Use commas to separate 3 or more items in a series

Tissue samples were deparaffinized in xylene, rehydrated by successive incubations in 70% ethanol and water, and stained with hematoxylin.

# Use commas to separate 3 or more items in a series

We reviewed the records of patients treated for melanoma; breast, lung, and colorectal cancers; and glioblastoma.

 We reviewed the records of patients treated for melanoma, breast, lung, and colorectal cancers, and glioblastoma.

# Use commas between adjectives of equal status

MD Anderson has a **talented, efficient, diverse** staff.

MD Anderson has a **diverse, talented, efficient** staff.

# Use commas between adjectives of equal status


MD Anderson has a **talented clinical** staff.

**X** MD Anderson has a **clinical talented** staff.

# Use commas between adjectives of equal status

But: Do not use commas to separate adjectives in terms that are considered one entity.

**Diffuse large B-cell lymphoma** is the most common subtype of non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

 **Diffuse, large, B-cell lymphoma** is the most common subtype of non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

# Use a comma to introduce a direct quotation

Marie Curie **said**, “I was taught that the way of progress is neither swift nor easy.”

“I was taught that the way of progress is neither swift nor easy,” **said** Marie Curie.

# Use commas to indicate that someone is being directly addressed

**Fellow physicians,** I urge you to support the proposed health care legislation.



# Use commas to indicate that someone is being directly addressed

It's time to eat, **Chocolate**.

It's time to eat Chocolate.



# Use commas to set apart elements of dates

The conference will take place **Saturday, December 5, 2018**, in Houston.

The conference will take place **Saturday** in Houston.

The conference will take place **December 5** in Houston.

The drug was approved by the FDA in **November 2017**.

# Use commas to set apart elements of addresses

The conference will take place at **Hotel ZaZa, 5701 S Main St, Houston, Texas 77005.**

# Use commas to separate names from academic degrees

Gregory House, **MD, PhD**, is the study's principal investigator.

Dr Gregory House is the study's principal investigator.

# Online resources

- *AMA Manual of Style*: available online through the Research Medical Library (go to <http://www3.mdanderson.org/library/> and enter “AMA Manual” in the “Search the Library” box)
- *MD Anderson Stylebook*: available through Brand Central (go to <https://mdabrandcentral.com/site/login>, click “Editorial standards,” and click the “Download MD Anderson Styleguide” button)
- Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/owlprint/607/>

# Sources

- *AMA Manual of Style*, 10th edition. New York: Oxford University Press; 2007:336-338.
- *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press; 2010:311-325.
- *Harbrace College Handbook*, 12th ed. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace; 1994:127-131.
- Purdue Online Writing Lab. Commas: Quick Rules. [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/punctuation/commas/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/commas/index.html). Accessed July 11, 2018.
- Strunk W, White EB. *Elements of Style*, 3rd ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon; 1979:2-5.

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