

Never use (!) to communicate amazement or sarcasm. Choose words to deliver your message.

NO At 29,035 feet (!), Mt. Everest is the world's highest mountain. Yet, Chris (!) wants to climb it.

YES At a **majestic** 29,035 feet, Mt. Everest is the world's highest mountain. Yet, Chris, **amazingly**, wants to climb it.

EXERCISE 22-1 Insert any needed periods, question marks, and exclamation points and delete any unneeded ones. For help, consult all sections of this chapter.

EXAMPLE Dr Madan Kataria, who calls himself the Giggling Guru (!), established the world's first laughter club in 1995.

Dr. Madan Kataria, who calls himself the Giggling Guru, established the world's first laughter club in 1995.

1. More than 1,000 (?) laughter clubs exist throughout the world, each seeking to promote health by reducing stress and strengthening the immune system!
2. Dr Madan Kataria, a physician in Bombay, India, developed a yoga-like (!) strategy based on group (!) laughter and then set up laughter clubs.
3. Laughter clubs say, "Yes!" when asked, "Is laughter the best medicine."
4. The clubs' activities include breathing and stretching exercises and playful (?) behaviors, such as performing the opera laugh (!), the chicken laugh (!), and the "Ho-Ho, Ha-Ha" (?) exercise.
5. According to the German psychologist Dr Michael Titze, "In the 1950s people used to laugh eighteen minutes a day (!), but today we laugh not more than six (?) minutes per day, despite huge rises in the standard of living."

CHAPTER 23

Commas

23a What is the role of the comma?

Commas are the most frequently used marks of punctuation, occurring twice as often as all other punctuation marks combined. A comma must be used in certain places, it must not be used in other places, and it's optional in still other places. This chapter helps you sort through the various rules.

For quick access to most answers when you have a comma question, consult Box 23-1. The sections in parentheses indicate where you can find fuller explanations.

BOX 23-1 SUMMARY


Key uses of commas

Commas with Coordinating Conjunctions Linking Independent Clauses (23b)

- Postcards are ideal for brief greetings, **and** they can also be miniature works of art. [*and* is a coordinating conjunction]

Commas after Introductory Elements (23c)

- **Although most postcards cost only a dime**, one recently sold for thousands of dollars. [*clause*]
- **On postcard racks**, several designs are usually available. [*phrase*]
- **For example**, animals are timeless favorites. [*transitional expression*]
- **However**, most cards show local landmarks. [*word*]

Commas with Items in Series (23d)

- **Places, paintings, and people** appear on postcards. [*and* between last two items]
- **Places, paintings, people, animals** occupy dozens of display racks. [*no and* between last two items]

Commas with Coordinate Adjectives (23e)

- Some postcards feature **appealing, dramatic** scenes.

No Commas with Cumulative Adjectives (23e)

- Other postcards feature **famous historical** scenes.

Commas with Nonrestrictive Elements (23f)

- **Four years after the first postcard appeared**, the US government began to issue prestamped postcards. [*nonrestrictive element introduces independent clause*]
- The Golden Age of postcards, **which lasted from about 1900 to 1929**, yielded many especially valuable cards. [*nonrestrictive element interrupts independent clause*]
- Collectors attend postcard shows, **which are similar to baseball-card shows**. [*nonrestrictive element ends independent clause*]



Key uses of commas (*continued*)**No Commas with Restrictive Elements (23f)**

- Collectors **who attend these shows** may specialize in a particular kind of postcard. [restrictive clause]

Commas with Quoted Works (23h)

- One collector told me, “Attending a show is like digging for buried treasure.” [quoted words at end of sentence]
- “I always expect to find a priceless postcard,” he said. [quoted words at start of sentence]
- “Everyone there,” he joked, “believes a million-dollar card is hidden in the next stack.” [quoted words interrupted mid-sentence]

23b How do commas work with coordinating conjunctions?

Never use a comma when a coordinating conjunction links only two words, two PHRASES, or two DEPENDENT CLAUSES.

NO Habitat for Humanity depends on volunteers for **labor and donations** to help with its construction projects. [*Labor and donations* are two words; the conjunction explains their relationship. No comma is needed.]

YES Habitat for Humanity depends on volunteers for **labor and donations** to help with its construction projects.

Do use a comma when a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, for, or, nor, yet, so*) links two or more INDEPENDENT CLAUSES. Place the comma before the coordinating conjunction.

The sky turned dark gray, **and** the wind died suddenly.

The November morning had just begun, **but** it looked like dusk.

Exceptions

- When two independent clauses are very short, and they contrast with each other, you can link them with a comma without using a coordinating conjunction: *Mosquitoes don't bite, they stab*. Some instructors consider this an error, so in ACADEMIC WRITING, you'll never be wrong if you use a period or semicolon (Chapter 24) instead of a comma.

- When one or both independent clauses linked by a coordinating conjunction happen to contain other commas, drop the coordinating conjunction and use a semicolon instead of the comma. This can help clarify meaning.

With temperatures below freezing, the snow did not melt; and people wondered, gazing at the white landscape, when they would see grass again.

EXERCISE 23-1 Combine each pair of sentences using the coordinating conjunction shown in parentheses. Rearrange words when necessary. For help, consult 23b.

EXAMPLE Almonds originated in China. They are now the top export crop from the United States. (but)

Almonds originated in China, but they are now the top export crop from the United States.

1. California's 6,000 almond growers produce over 70 percent of the world's almonds. This crop is worth nearly \$800 million a year. (and)
2. Central California provides ideal growing conditions for almonds. The flat land is rich in nutrients. (for)
3. Almonds and peaches are genetically related. A small almond cutting can be spliced to a peach pit root to make the almond tree sturdier. (so)
4. The bees that pollinate the trees will not fly when the temperature is below 54 degrees. Bees will not fly when it rains. (nor)
5. The nuts are hulled and shelled by machine. Many nuts remain flawless and demand a high price. (yet)

23c How do commas work with introductory clauses, phrases, and words?

A comma follows any introductory element that comes before an INDEPENDENT CLAUSE. An introductory element can be a CLAUSE, PHRASE, or words. Because these elements are not sentences by themselves, you need to join them to independent clauses.

When the topic is dieting, many people say sugar craving is their worst problem. [introductory dependent clause]

Sweets being a temptation for many adults, most parents avoid commercial baby foods that contain sugar. [introductory absolute phrase]

For example, fructose comes from fruit, but it's still sugar. [introductory transitional expression]

Exception

When an introductory element is short, and the sentence can be understood easily, some writers omit the comma. However, in ACADEMIC WRITING, you'll never be wrong if you use the comma.

YES In 1992, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed.
[preferred]

YES In 1992 the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed.

An **interjection** is an introductory word that conveys surprise or other emotions. Use a comma after an interjection at the beginning of a sentence: *Oh, we didn't realize that you're allergic to cats. Yes, your sneezing worries me.*



ALERT: Use a comma before and after a transitional expression that falls in the middle of a sentence. When the transitional expression starts a sentence, follow it with a comma. When the transitional expression ends a sentence, put a comma before it.

By the way, the parade begins at noon. [introductory transitional expression with comma after it]

The parade, **by the way,** begins at noon. [transitional expression with comma before and after it, in middle of sentence]

The parade begins at noon, **by the way.** [transitional expression with comma before it, at end of sentence]

EXERCISE 23-2 Using a comma after the introductory element, combine each set of sentences into one sentence according to the directions in parentheses. You can add, delete, and rearrange words as needed. For help, consult 23c.

EXAMPLE Several magicians have revealed their secrets. They have revealed their secrets recently. (begin with *recently*)

Recently, several magicians have revealed their secrets.

1. One famous trick involves sawing a woman in half. This trick actually uses two women. (begin with *for example*)
2. The brave female assistant lies down in the box. The opened box lid faces away from the audience. (begin with *when*)
3. Observers watch in astonishment. The magician pushes a saw through the middle of the box. (begin with *in astonishment*)
4. The first assistant walks behind the box. This assistant lies down in the box and pulls her knees up to her chest. (begin with *walking*)
5. The second woman folds her body by bending forward at the waist. She puts her feet out the holes at her end of the box (begin with *to create the illusion*)

23d How do commas work with items in a series?

A **series** is a group of three or more elements—words, PHRASES, or CLAUSES—that match in grammatical form and are of equal importance in a sentence.

Marriage requires **sexual, financial, and emotional** discipline.

—Anne Roiphe, “Why Marriages Fail”

Culture is a way of **thinking, feeling, believing.**

—Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man*

My love of flying goes back to those early days **of roller skates, of swings, and of bicycles.**

—Tresa Wiggins, student

We have been taught **that children develop by ages and stages, that the steps are pretty much the same for everybody, and that to grow out of the limited behavior of childhood, we must climb them all.**

—Gail Sheehy, *Passages*

Many general publications omit the comma between the next to last item of a series and the coordinating conjunction. Recently, practice is changing even in ACADEMIC WRITING, which means that some instructors require the use of a comma here and others consider it an error. Check with your instructor.

NO The sweater comes in **blue, green, pink and black.** [Do the sweaters come in three or four colors?]

YES The sweater comes in **blue, green, pink, and black.** [The comma before *and* clarifies that the sweaters come in four colors.]

At all times, however, follow the “toast, juice, and ham and eggs rule.” That is, when one of the items in a series contains *and*, don’t use a comma in that item.

When items in a series contain commas or other punctuation, separate them with SEMICOLONS instead of commas (24e).

If it’s a bakery, they have to sell cake; if it’s a photography shop, they have to develop film; and if it’s a dry-goods store, they have to sell warm underwear.

—Art Buchwald, “Birth Control for Banks”

Numbered or lettered lists within a sentence are considered items in a series. With three or more items, use commas (or semicolons if the items themselves contain commas) to separate them.

To file your insurance claim, please enclose (1) a letter requesting payment, (2) a police report about the robbery, **and** (3) proof of purchase of the items you say are missing.




ALERT: In a series, never use a comma before the first item or after the last item, unless a different rule makes it necessary.

NO Many **artists, writers, and composers, have indulged** in daydreaming.

YES Many artists, writers, and composers **have indulged** in daydreaming.

How do commas work with coordinate adjectives?

- NO** Such dreamers include Miró, Debussy, Dostoevsky, and Dickinson.
- YES** Such dreamers include Miró, Debussy, Dostoevsky, and Dickinson.
- YES** Such dreamers include, **of course**, Miró, Debussy, Dostoevsky, and Dickinson. [As a transitional expression, *of course* is set off from the rest of the sentence by commas before and after it (23c).] 

23e How do commas work with coordinate adjectives?

Coordinate adjectives are two or more ADJECTIVES of equal weight that describe—that is, modify—a NOUN. In contrast, **cumulative adjectives** build meaning from word to word, as they move toward the noun. The key to applying this rule is recognizing when adjectives are coordinate and when they aren't. Box 23-2 tells you how.

The audience cheered when the **pulsating, rhythmic** music filled the stadium. [*Pulsating* and *rhythmic* are coordinate adjectives.]

BOX 23-2 SUMMARY



Tests for coordinate and cumulative adjectives

If either one of these tests works, the adjectives are coordinate and require a comma between them.

- Can the order of the adjectives be reversed without changing the meaning or creating nonsense? If yes, use a comma.
 - NO** The concert featured **new several** bands. [*New several* makes no sense.]
 - YES** The **huge, restless** crowd waited for the concert to begin. [*Restless, huge* still carries the same meaning so these are coordinate adjectives.]
- Can *and* be sensibly inserted between the adjectives? If yes, use a comma.
 - NO** The concert featured **several and new** bands. [*Several and new* makes no sense.]
 - YES** The **huge and restless** crowd waited. [Modifier *huge and restless* makes sense, so these are coordinate adjectives.]

Each band had a **distinctive musical** style. [*Distinctive* and *musical* aren't coordinate adjectives.]



ALERT: Don't put a comma between a final coordinate adjective and the noun it modifies.

NO Hundreds of **roaring, cheering, yelling, fans** filled the stadium.

YES Hundreds of **roaring, cheering, yelling fans** filled the stadium.

EXERCISE 23-3 Insert commas to separate coordinate adjectives. If a sentence needs no commas, explain why. For help, consult 23e.

EXAMPLE Only corn grown for popcorn pops consistently because all other kinds of corn lack tough enamel-like shells.

Only corn grown for popcorn pops consistently because all other kinds of corn lack *tough, enamel-like* shells.

1. The outside of an unpopped popcorn kernel is a hard plastic-like coating.
2. Inside an unpopped kernel is a soft starchy substance combined with water.
3. Applying heat causes the water molecules to expand until the pressure pops the dark yellow kernel.
4. The popped kernel turns itself inside out and absorbs air into its white pulpy matter.
5. The thinner softer shells of nonpopcorn corn don't allow water to heat to the high popping temperature.

23f

How do commas work with nonrestrictive elements?

A **restrictive element** contains information (a descriptive word, clause, or phrase) that's essential for a sentence to deliver its message; thus, it is often called an *essential element*. A **nonrestrictive element** contains information that's not essential for a sentence to deliver its meaning, and therefore, it is often called a *nonessential element*. The key is in recognizing what's essential (restrictive) and what's nonessential (nonrestrictive) in a sentence. Box 23-3 defines and explains the differences in the meanings of these terms.

Box 23-4 shows the pattern for comma use with nonrestrictive elements. The pattern for restrictive elements calls for no commas.

Restrictive and nonrestrictive elements can fall at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence. To test whether an element is nonrestrictive, read the sentence without the element. If the meaning of the sentence does not change, the element is nonrestrictive.

BOX 23-3 SUMMARY



Restrictive and nonrestrictive defined

Restrictive

A restrictive element contains information essential for the sentence to deliver its message. By being essential, the words in the element limit—that is, “restrict”—the meaning in some way. Don’t use commas with restrictive elements.

Many US states retest drivers **who are over sixty-five** to check their driving competency.

The information *who are over sixty-five* is essential to understanding the sentence because it limits or restricts the meaning of *drivers* to only those over the age of sixty-five. Drivers *under* sixty-five are not included. To check whether an element is essential, drop it and read the sentence. If the meaning of the sentence changes, then the information element is essential in delivering the message intended in the sentence. This means the element is restrictive (essential), and *commas are not used*.

Nonrestrictive

A nonrestrictive element contains information that’s *not* essential for the sentence to deliver its message. By being nonessential, the words in the element don’t limit—or “restrict”—the meaning in some way. Use commas with nonrestrictive (nonessential) elements.

My parents, **who are both over sixty-five**, took a defensive driving course.

The information *who are both over sixty-five* is not essential because the words *my parents* carry the sentence’s message so that we know who took a defensive driving course. (Information about their age is “extra” to this message, so *commas are required*.)

BOX 23-4 PATTERN



Commas with nonrestrictive elements

- **Nonrestrictive element**, independent clause.
- Beginning of independent clause, **nonrestrictive element**, end of independent clause.
- Independent clause, **nonrestrictive element**.

EXERCISE 23-4 Using your knowledge of restrictive and nonrestrictive elements, insert commas as needed. If a sentence is correct, explain why. For help, consult 23f.

EXAMPLE During the 1990s when Internet start-ups were proliferating computer science majors often received many job offers even before they graduated.

During the 1990s, when Internet start-ups were proliferating, computer science majors often received many job offers even before they graduated.

1. In the fall of 2000 at the height of the Internet boom over 700 students packed a lecture hall for an introductory computer science course at the University of California at Berkeley.
2. These students who understood the US economic cycle switched to less-specialized majors.
3. Because educators and computer scientists know that the decrease in the number of computer-science majors is only temporary they are not worried about the future.
4. Each time the US economy gathers steam again leading to demands for advances in computer technology companies suddenly need programmers and systems analysts again.
5. Then students whose strongest interest is computer science will flock back to the courses that once more promise lucrative and interesting job possibilities.

23g How do commas set off parenthetical expressions, contrasts, words of direct address, and tag sentences?

Parenthetical expressions are “asides.” They add information but aren’t necessary for understanding the message of a sentence. Set them off with parentheses or commas.

American farmers (according to US government figures) export more wheat than they sell at home.

A major drought, sad to say, wiped out this year’s wheat crop.

Expressions of **contrast** state what is *not* the case. Set them off with commas.

Feeding the world’s population is a serious, though not impossible, problem.

We must work against world hunger continuously, not only when famines strike.

Words of **direct address** name the person or group being spoken to (addressed). Set them off with commas.

Join me, **brothers and sisters**, to end hunger.

Your contribution to the Relief Fund, **Steve**, will help us greatly.

A **tag sentence** is a normal sentence that ends with a “tag,” an attached phrase or question. Set off a tag with a comma. When the tag is a question, the sentence ends with a question mark. This holds whether or not the **tag question** is formed with a CONTRACTION.

People will give blood regularly, **I hope**.

The response to the blood drive was impressive, **wasn't it?**

23h How do commas work with quoted words?

Explanatory words are words such as *said*, *stated*, *declared*, and others that introduce DIRECT DISCOURSE. When they fall in the same sentence, quoted words are set off from explanatory words. Box 23-5 shows this pattern.

Speaking of ideal love, the poet William Blake wrote, “Love seeketh not itself to please.”

“My love is a fever,” said William Shakespeare about love’s passion.

“I love no love,” proclaimed poet Mary Coleridge, “but thee.”

BOX 23-5 PATTERN



Commas with quoted words

- Explanatory words, “Quoted words.”
- “Quoted words,” explanatory words.
- “Quoted words begin,” explanatory words, “quoted words continue.”

Exception

When the quoted words are blended into the grammatical structure of your sentence, don’t use commas to set them off. These are instances of INDIRECT DISCOURSE, usually occurring with *as* and *that*.

The duke describes the duchess **as** “too soon made glad.”

The duchess insists **that** “appearing glad often is but a deception.”

23i How do commas work in dates, names, addresses, correspondence, and numbers?

When you write dates, names, addresses, correspondence, and numbers, use commas according to accepted practice.

Commas with dates

- Use a comma between the date and the year: **July 20, 1969**.
- Use a comma between the day and the date: **Sunday, July 20**.
- Within a sentence, use a comma on both sides of the year in a full date: *Everyone planned to be near a TV set on July 20, 1969, to watch the lunar landing.*
- Never use a comma when only the month and year, or the month and day, are given. Also, never use a comma between the season and year.

YES

People knew that one day in **July 1969** would change the world.

YES

News coverage was especially heavy on **July 21**.

YES

In **summer 1969** a man walked on the moon.

- Never use a comma in an inverted date, a form used in the US military and throughout the world except in the United States.

YES

People stayed near their televisions on **20 July 1969** to watch the moon landing.

Commas with names, places, and addresses

- When an abbreviated academic degree (*MD, PhD*) comes after a person's name, use a comma between the name and the title (*Angie Eng, MD*), and also after the title if other words follow in the sentence: *The jury listened closely to the expert testimony of Angie Eng, MD, last week.*
- When an indicator of birth order or succession (*Jr, Sr, III, IV*) follows a name, never use a comma before or after it: Martin Luther **King Jr** was a great leader in the United States of America.
- When you invert a person's name, use a comma to separate the last name from the first: **Troyka, David**
- When city and state names are written together, use a comma to separate them: **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**. If the city and state fall within a sentence, use a comma after the state as well: *My family settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania before I was born.*
- When a complete address is part of a sentence, use a comma to separate all the items, except the state and zip code: *I wrote to Shelly Kupperman, 1001 Rule Road, Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458, for more information about the comma.*

Commas in correspondence

- For the opening of an informal letter, use a comma: **Dear Betty,**
- For the opening of a business or formal letter, use a colon: **Dear Ms. Kiviat:**

- For the close of a letter, use a comma:
Sincerely yours, **Best regards,** **Love,**

Commas with numbers

- Counting from right to left, put a comma after every three digits in numbers with more than four digits.

72,867 156,567,066

- A comma is optional in most four-digit numbers. Be consistent within each piece of writing.

\$1776 \$1,776

1776 miles 1,776 miles

1776 potatoes 1,776 potatoes

- Never use a comma in a four-digit year: **1990** (Note: If the year has five digits or more, do use a comma: **25,000 BC.**)
- Never use a comma in an address of four digits or more: **12161 Dean Drive**
- Never use a comma in a page number of four digits or more: **see page 1338**
- Use a comma to separate related measurements written as words: **five feet, four inches**
- Use a comma to separate a scene from an act in a play: **act II, scene iv** (or **act 2, scene 4**)
- Use a comma to separate references to a page and a line: **page 10, line 6**

EXERCISE 23-5 Insert commas where they are needed. For help, consult 23i.

EXAMPLE On June 1 1984 the small German-French production company released a feature film called *Paris Texas*.

On June 1, 1984, the small German-French production company released a feature film called *Paris, Texas*.

1. Made by the noted German director Wim Wenders, *Paris Texas* was set in an actual town in Lamar County Texas with a population of 24699.
2. The movie's title was clearly intended to play off the slightly more famous Paris in France.
3. The custom of naming little towns in the United States after cosmopolitan urban centers in the Old World has resulted in such places as Athens Georgia and St. Petersburg Florida.
4. As of June 1 2003 the American St. Petersburg had 248232 citizens and the American Athens had 100266.
5. By comparison, St. Petersburg Russia and Athens Greece have populations of approximately 4 million and 1 million, respectively.

23j How do commas clarify meaning?

A comma is sometimes needed to clarify the meaning of a sentence, even though no rule calls for one. The best solution is to revise the sentence.

NO Those who can practice many hours a day.

YES **Those who can,** practice many hours a day.

YES **They** practice many hours a day **when they can.** [preferred]

EXERCISE 23-6 Insert commas to prevent misreading. For help, consult, 23j.

EXAMPLE When hunting owls use both vision and hearing.

When hunting, owls use both vision and hearing.

1. Flying at night owls consult a mental “map” of their surroundings.
2. During the daylight hours, healthy owls who can fly over their territories and create a map using their eyes and ears.
3. A team of scientists gave owls distorting eyeglasses to make the birds relearn their mental maps.
4. The bespectacled owl scientists found wears its glasses as contentedly as humans.
5. In a short time after they have produced a new mental map using their glasses the owls once again can spot and chase small rodents across the ground.

23k How can I avoid misusing commas?

Throughout this chapter, Alert notes remind you about comma misuses, as they relate to each comma rule. Most of these misuses are overuses—inserting a comma where one is unnecessary. This section summarizes the Alert notes and lists other frequent misuses of the comma.

When advice against overusing a comma clashes with a rule requiring one, follow the rule that requires the comma.

The town of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, attracts thousands of tourists each year. [Even though the comma after *North Carolina* separates the subject and its verb (which it normally shouldn’t), the comma is required here because of the rule that calls for a comma when the name of a state follows the name of a city within a sentence (23i).]

23k.1 Commas with coordinating conjunctions

Never use a comma after a COORDINATING CONJUNCTION that joins two INDEPENDENT CLAUSES, unless another rule makes it necessary (23b). Also, don’t use a comma to separate two items joined with a coordinating conjunction—there must be at least three (see 23d).

- NO The sky was dark gray **and**, it looked like dusk.
 YES The sky was dark gray, **and** it looked like dusk.
 NO **The moon, and the stars** were shining last night.
 YES **The moon and the stars** were shining last night.

23k.2 Commas with subordinating conjunctions and prepositions

Never put a comma after a SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTION or a PREPOSITION unless another rule makes it necessary.

- NO **Although**, the storm brought high winds, it did no damage.
 YES **Although the storm brought high winds**, it did no damage.
 [comma follows full subordinated dependent clause, not the subordinate conjunction that begins it]
 NO The storm did no damage **although**, it brought high winds.
 YES The storm did no damage **although it brought high winds**.
 [no comma when subordinate clause follows the independent clause]

23k.3 Commas in a series

Never use a comma before the first, or after the last, item in a series, unless another rule makes it necessary (23d).

- NO The gymnasium was decorated **with, red, white, and blue** ribbons for the Fourth of July.
 NO The gymnasium was decorated with **red, white, and blue,** ribbons for the Fourth of July.
 YES The gymnasium was decorated with **red, white, and blue** ribbons for the Fourth of July.

Never put a comma between a final COORDINATE ADJECTIVE and the NOUN that the adjectives modify. Also, don't use a comma between adjectives that are not coordinate (23e).

- NO He wore an **old, baggy, sweater**.
 YES He wore an **old, baggy sweater**. [coordinate adjectives]
 NO He has **several, new sweaters**.
 YES He has **several new sweaters**. [noncoordinate or cumulative adjectives]

23k.4 Commas with restrictive elements

Never use a comma to set off a RESTRICTIVE (essential) element from the rest of a sentence (23f).

NO **Vegetables, stir-fried in a wok,** are crisp and flavorful. [The words *stir-fried in a wok* are essential, so they are not set off with commas.]

YES **Vegetables stir-fried in a wok** are crisp and flavorful.

23k.5 Commas with quotations

Never use a comma to set off INDIRECT DISCOURSE; use a comma only with DIRECT DISCOURSE (23h).

NO Jon said **that, he likes** stir-fried vegetables.

YES Jon said **that he likes** stir-fried vegetables.

YES **Jon said, “I like** stir-fried vegetables.”

23k.6 Commas that separate a subject from its verb, a verb from its object, or a preposition from its object

A comma does not make sense between these elements, though in some cases another comma rule might supersede this guideline (as in the first example in section 23k).

NO **The brothers Wright, made** their first successful airplane flights on December 17, 1903. [As a rule, a comma doesn't separate a subject from its verb.]

YES **The brothers Wright made** their first successful airplane flights on December 17, 1903.

NO These inventors enthusiastically **tackled, the problems** of powered flight and aerodynamics. [As a rule, a comma doesn't separate a verb from its OBJECT.]

YES These inventors enthusiastically **tackled the problems** of powered flight and aerodynamics.

NO Airplane hobbyists visit Kitty Hawk's flight museum **from, all over the world.** [As a rule, a comma doesn't separate a preposition from its object.]

YES Airplane hobbyists visit Kitty Hawk's flight museum **from all over the world.**

EXERCISE 23-7 Some commas have been deliberately misused in these sentences. Delete misused commas. If a sentence is correct, explain why. For help, consult all parts of this chapter, especially 23j and 23k.

EXAMPLE People who live in earthquake-prone regions, have long looked forward to reliable means of forecasting tremblers.

People who live in earthquake-prone *regions* have long looked forward to reliable means of forecasting tremblers.

1. Since the 1970s, scientists have attempted to provide accurate predictions of, earthquake size and intensity.
2. The task has turned out to be harder than expected, for research geologists have yet to develop a clear understanding of the many complex forces, that cause earthquakes.
3. The earth's crust is made up of large, rigid, plates that slide over a semi-liquid mantle, and stress builds up when two plates meet.
4. Scientists need to understand, exactly when the stress will become so great that a quake results, but that has proved difficult.
5. Although, geologists can accurately predict the local aftershocks that result from a large earthquake, they cannot precisely determine when a big quake will hit or, when distant aftershocks will occur.
6. Scientists use information about tensions, along major cracks in rock layers, to understand the general process of predicting, where a large tremor will hit.
7. For example, geologists have predicted that the next major earthquake along, the North Anatolian fault in Turkey, will strike near the city of Istanbul.
8. Unfortunately, scientists cannot save thousands of lives by determining, even the approximate date of the expected large quake.
9. Interestingly, scientists once had amazing success in predicting a 1975 earthquake in Haicheng, China, after, a sequence of small earthquakes, changes in groundwater level, and strange behavior by animals.
10. However, geologists say that, even these clues did not successfully reveal the magnitude, and timing of any other major earthquake.

231 How can I avoid comma errors?

You can avoid most comma errors with these two bits of advice:

- As you write or reread what you've written, never insert a comma simply because you happen to pause to think or take a breath before moving on. Pausing isn't a reliable guide for writers, although that myth continues to thrive. Throughout the United States, and indeed the world, people's breathing rhythms, accents, and thinking patterns vary greatly.
- As you're writing, if you're unsure about a comma, insert it and circle the spot. Later, when you're EDITING, check this handbook for the rule that applies.