

Diana Hacker's Ten Fundamental Principles for Using Commas, with Examples.¹

Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining two independent clauses.

He was sitting under the Sorting Hat, and it was telling him he would do well in Slytherin... (534).

Use a comma after an introductory word group.

On the whole, Harry thought he was to be congratulated on his idea of hiding there (2).

Use a comma between all items in a series.

Every day this summer had been the same: the tension, the expectation, the temporary relief, and then the mounting tension again... (3). /// Moon, stars, and street lamps burst back into life (19).

Use a comma between coordinate adjectives not joined by 'and'. [Do not use a comma between cumulative adjectives].

*They were surrounded by a total, impenetrable, silent darkness (16);
but...[Small white lights popped in front of Harry's eyes... (17).]*

Use commas to set off nonrestrictive elements. (Do not use commas to set off restrictive elements.)

Adjective clauses: *...Moody had replaced his eye, which was spinning so fast after its cleaning it made Harry feel sick (53).*

Phrases functioning as adjectives: *Hermione, still beaming, let go of Harry... (61).*

Appositives *There were hurried footsteps and Ron's mother, Mrs. Weasley, emerged from the door (61).*

Use commas to set off transitional & parenthetical expressions, absolute phrases, and contrasted elements.

Transitional expressions: *At Sirius's words, however, the crushing sense of dread returned... (115).*

Parenthetical expressions: *Her husband, a thin, balding, red-haired man, who wore horn-rimmed glasses, looked around and jumped to his feet (80).*

Absolute phrases: *Jostled slightly by the crowd, Harry followed Mr. Weasley through the gates... (129)*

Contrasted elements: *(Sirius) was moodier and surlier than before, talking less to everyone, even Harry, and spending increasing time shut up in his mother's room (158).*

Use commas to set off nouns of direct address, 'yes' or 'no', interrogative tags, and mild interjections.

"That's a bit harsh, Hermione"... (158). "Well, now that you understand what dreadful lives they lead..." (159)

Use commas with expressions such as 'he said' to set off direct quotations.

"You were so keen to help the Order," said Mrs. Weasley (159).

Use commas with dates, addresses, titles and numbers.

Harry thought, and no sooner had he reached the part about number twelve, Grimauld Place, than a battered door emerged out of nowhere between numbers eleven and thirteen... (59).

¹ These ten rules for commas are set forth in *Rules for Writers*, by Diana Hacker (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2004). The examples all come from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, by J.K. Rowling (New York: Scholastic Press, 2003); the page numbers refer to pages in Rowling's novel, from which all the examples are gratefully excerpted. ~ PRB, 10/2010.

Albus Dumbledore, newly reinstated Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, reinstated member of the International Confederation of Wizards, and reinstated Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, was unavailable for comment last night (846).

Use a comma to prevent confusion.

Before Hermione could answer, a tall, black girl with long braided hair had marched up to Harry (224).