

Punctuation (page 1 of 4)

By Dr. Karen Petit

Commas with Coordinating Conjunctions (FANBOYS): for and nor but or yet so

- When two clauses are joined by one of the FANBOYS, a comma is needed. A clause has both a subject and a verb; most clauses also have other elements, such as objects, modifiers, and phrases.
→ The CCRI Writing Center has helpful handouts, and I love to read the textbooks.
- When 2 words or phrases are connected by one of the FANBOYS, no comma is used.
→ The CCRI Writing Center has helpful handouts and interesting textbooks.
→ The CCRI Writing Center has helpful handouts and encourages everyone to use them.
- When 3 or more words or phrases are joined by one of the FANBOYS, a comma is needed.
→ The CCRI Writing Center has handouts, textbooks, and ideas.

Commas with Correlative Conjunctive Pairs

both ___ and ___ either ___ or ___ neither ___ not ___
whether ___ or ___ not only ___ but ___ not only ___ but also ___

- Most of the time, punctuation marks are not used with correlative conjunctive pairs, except in cases where entire clauses are joined or when an interrupting element is present.
→ I have seen an improvement not only in my papers but also in my grades.
→ Not only can I write faster, but I enjoy writing more.

Commas, Semi-colons, and Periods with Conjunctive Adverbs and Transitional Phrases consequently finally for example furthermore however in fact meanwhile moreover on the other hand then therefore thus

- When a conjunctive adverb or a transitional phrase joins two clauses together, a semi-colon or a period is needed before the adverb/phrase, and a comma is needed after the adverb/phrase.
→ I am not yet getting A's on my papers; however, my grades have been improving throughout the semester, thanks to the extra help that I've been receiving at the CCRI Writing Center.
→ I plan to keep going to the Writing Center. Therefore, my skills and knowledge about writing will keep increasing.
- When a conjunctive adverb or a transitional phrase interrupts the flow of a sentence, here is an example of correct punctuation:
→ I'm not yet getting A's on my papers; my grades, however, have been improving throughout the semester.

Commas with Addresses and Dates

- Commas are used to separate different sections of an address or a date.
→ The Knight Campus of the Community College of Rhode Island is located at 400 East Avenue, Warwick, Rhode Island 02886-1807, and the Liston Campus is located in Providence, Rhode Island, on Hilton Street.
→ CCRI's Flanagan Campus opened in September, 1976.

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Commas with Introductory Phrases and Clauses

- When a phrase or a dependent clause introduces a main clause, a comma is needed.
 - At the Community College of Rhode Island, the Writing Center has handouts with listings of helpful websites.
 - After the semester begins, the Writing Center gets busy.
- If the introductory element is a very short prepositional phrase, a comma is optional.
 - In 1972, the Knight campus opened. or: In 1972 the Knight campus opened.
- Occasionally, a beginning phrase does not need a comma because the phrase is a part of the main idea, rather than being an introduction to the main idea.
 - Looking at websites can be fun.
 - At the Community College of Rhode Island are handouts with listings of websites.
- When a phrase or a clause is in the middle or at the end of a sentence, a comma may or may not be needed. If the phrase or clause is an interrupting, contrasting, or nonrestrictive element, then one or more commas are needed.
 - The Writing Center at CCRI is a small, but important, part of the campus.
 - According to the CCRI website, the Community College of Rhode Island, my favorite college, began with 325 students in 1964.

Commas with Subordinating Conjunctions

**after although as as if because before even even though if
since so that though unless until what when where while**

- When a subordinate clause begins a sentence, a comma is needed.
 - When I get additional ideas for my papers at the Writing Center, my papers get better grades.
- When a subordinate clause comes in the middle or at the end of a sentence, a comma is only needed occasionally, such as when the clause is nonrestrictive (not essential in interpreting the meaning).
 - My papers improve because I and someone at the Writing Center spend extra time writing and revising my papers.
 - Thus, my writing skills also improve, since I learn helpful techniques geared specifically towards my own writing.

Commas with Adjectives

- Coordinate adjectives (similar kinds of adjectives) need commas to separate them.
 - I love to read interesting, informative textbooks.
- Cumulative adjectives (different kinds) do not need commas to separate them.
 - My favorite community college currently has more than 16,000 students.

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Commas with Relative Pronouns: **that which who whom whoever whomever**

- Relative pronouns relate the words in one clause to an idea in another clause.
- If a clause beginning with a relative pronoun is essential to the meaning (or restricts/changes the meaning) of what comes before the clause, then commas are not used.
 - Anyone who is taking a college-level course might write a research paper.
 - Books that are fun to read can improve a person's vocabulary.
- If a clause beginning with a relative pronoun is not essential to the meaning of what comes before the clause, then commas are needed both before and after the clause.
 - My friend, who is taking an English course at CCRI, is smart.
 - Books, which are fun to read, can improve a person's vocabulary.

Quotation Marks

- Exact words used by someone besides the writer (whether the words are spoken or written) should be placed in quotation marks. The quotation should be separated from the writer's words with commas.
 - "The student body at the Community College of Rhode Island," according to the CCRI website, "enjoys considerable diversity in ages, cultures and experiences. Sixty-two percent are women, 70 percent are part-time, 14 percent are from an ethnic minority group, and 60 percent are 25 years of age or older."
- Quotation marks also are used to show the exact words of each speaker in dialogue, to refer to a word as a word, and to indicate the title of a short work.
 - Hearing someone say the word "college" always brings a smile to my face.

Dashes, Parentheses, Brackets, and Ellipses

- To emphasize an element of a sentence that usually would be separated with commas before and after it, dashes can be used.
 - CCRI—my favorite college—has over 16,000 students.
- To de-emphasize an element of a sentence that usually would be separated from the rest of the sentence with commas, parentheses can be used.
 - According to a survey completed by 2,834 first-time CCRI freshmen between January 1, 2006, and November 5, 2006, "93.1% (2,639) reside in Rhode Island" (Office of Institutional Research and Planning, CCRI).
- Parentheses are placed around the source of a quotation. A set of brackets is used to add something to a quotation, and an ellipsis is used to indicate deleted words.
 - According to a survey completed by 2,834 first-time CCRI freshmen between January 1, 2006, and November 5, 2006, "93.1% . . . [of first-time freshmen] reside in Rhode Island" (Office of Institutional Research and Planning, CCRI).

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Semi-colons

- Semi-colons—instead of a period—can separate two independent clauses.
 - The tutors at the Writing Center do not write a paper for a student; they are really great at helping students to write papers, though, and at answering questions.
- Semi-colons can be used when items that already have commas in them need to be separated.
 - The CCRI Writing Center is open on three campuses: the Knight Campus, Warwick, RI; the Flanagan Campus, Lincoln, RI; and the Liston Campus, Providence, RI.

Colons

- Colons are used to introduce lists, examples, explanations, and quotations. The part of the sentence that precedes a colon must be able to stand by itself as a complete sentence.
 - CCRI's Writing Center has handouts focused on different aspects of writing: essay structure, literary analysis, punctuation, the MLA system, and the APA system.

Apostrophes

- Apostrophes can be used to show possession (with nouns—not with pronouns).
 - The students' favorite college is CCRI; their favorite campus varies.
- Apostrophes can indicate one or more missing letters in a contraction.
 - CCRI students are great! They're my best friends and future career contacts.
- Apostrophes are used to indicate a quotation within a quotation.
 - Here is a quotation from an earlier section of this handout: ““The student body at the Community College of Rhode Island,” according to the CCRI website, ‘enjoys considerable diversity in ages, cultures and experiences.’”
- Apostrophes are used in plural numbers, plural letters, and slang words.
 - The B's on my papers are wonderful; the A's are even better.

Hyphens

- Hyphens sometimes are used in compound words, compound numbers, and fractions.
 - Twenty-one students wrote papers, and two-thirds of these students used correct format.
- A hyphen can connect two or more words when they are being used as a single adjective.
 - Full-time students and part-time students attend the Community College of Rhode Island.

The following websites have additional information and online quizzes:

Capital Community College's Web site: <<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar>>

The OWL's Online Writing Lab at Purdue University: <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>>

John Langan's *English Skills* Web site:

<http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/0073384100/student_view0/index.html>

Anson, Schwegler, and Muth's online version of *The Longman Writer's Companion*:

<http://wps.ablongman.com/long_anson_lwc_3/0,9612,1576256-,00.html>