



Using commas

1. Commas separate the items in a list.

These items are sometimes real things. For example:

*I need some pens, pencils, paper and a calculator before I start my class.
I must buy some eggs, milk, sugar and tea.*

These items are sometimes things you do, or places you go. For example:

*Yesterday I went to work, played badminton, went to the pub and then went to bed.
I'm going to spend my holiday walking on the beach, sleeping in the sun and reading my book.*

BEWARE!

Always use 'and' to separate the last two items in your list.

Make sure you don't use a comma before the word 'and' at the end of your list.

Don't use commas where you should use a full-stop. If the words could stand alone as a proper sentence then you need to put a full-stop or a joining word ('and', 'but' etc) and not a comma. For example: For example:

Yesterday I went to work, I walked the dog, I went shopping and I washed the car.

This sentence is not correct because all four separate clauses could stand alone as proper short sentences. To write them as a list (for example, to show you were in a hurry, or that you had a lot to do) take out the 'I'.

Yesterday I went to work, walked the dog, went shopping and washed the car.

2. Commas mark out the less important part of a sentence.

This is a useful way to make your sentences more interesting by adding extra information. For example

The car, which was parked by the light, had a dog in the back seat.

This sentence is about the car and the dog, it's not about where the car was parked.

Tony, his mum's favourite, was given chocolate cake for tea.

This sentence is about Tony eating chocolate cake. We don't need 'his mum's favourite' for the sentence to make sense - it's extra information.

Checking use of commas

A quick way to check this second use of commas is to see if the sentence makes sense without the words between the commas. For example

The first sentence: 'The car, which was parked by the light, had a dog in the back seat.'
would become: 'The car _____ had a dog in the back seat.'

The sentence makes sense so the commas are in the right places.