



Commas After Introductions

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Introductory Clauses

Introductory clauses are dependent clauses that provide background information or "set the stage" for the main part of the sentence, the independent clause. For example:

- *If they want to win*, athletes must exercise every day. (introductory dependent clause, main clause)
- *Because he kept barking insistently*, we threw the ball for Smokey. (introductory dependent clause, main clause)

Clue: Introductory clauses start with adverbs like *after*, *although*, *as*, *because*, *before*, *if*, *since*, *though*, *until*, *when*, etc.

Introductory Phrases

Introductory phrases also set the stage for the main action of the sentence, but they are not complete clauses. Phrases don't have both a subject and a verb that are separate from the subject and verb in the main clause of the sentence. Common introductory phrases include prepositional phrases, appositive phrases, participial phrases, infinitive phrases, and absolute phrases.

- To stay in shape for competition, athletes must exercise every day. (introductory infinitive phrase, main clause)
- Barking insistently, Smokey got us to throw his ball for him. (introductory participial phrase, main clause)
- A popular and well respected mayor, Bailey was the clear favorite in the campaign for governor. (introductory appositive phrase, main clause)
- The wind blowing violently, the townspeople began to seek shelter. (introductory absolute phrase, main clause)
- After the adjustment for inflation, real wages have decreased while corporate profits have grown. (introductory prepositional phrases, main clause)

Introductory Words

Introductory words like *however*, *still*, *furthermore*, and *meanwhile* create continuity from one sentence to the next.

- The coaches reviewed the game strategy. *Meanwhile*, the athletes trained on the Nautilus equipment.
- Most of the evidence seemed convincing. *Still*, the credibility of some witnesses was in question.

When to Use a Comma

Introductory elements often require a comma, but not always. Use a [comma](#) in the following cases:

- after an introductory clause. (Does the introductory element have a subject and verb of its own?)
- after a long introductory prepositional phrase or more than one introductory prepositional phrase. (Are there more than five words before the main clause?)
- after introductory verbal phrases, some appositive phrases, or absolute phrases.
- if there is a distinct pause. (When you read the sentence aloud, do you find your voice pausing a moment after the introductory element?)
- to avoid confusion. (Might a reader have to read the sentence more than once to make sense of it?)

When not to Use a Comma

Some introductory elements don't require a comma, and sometimes the subject of a sentence looks like an introductory element but isn't. Do not use a comma in the following cases:

- after a brief prepositional phrase. (Is it a single phrase of less than five words?)
- after a restrictive (essential) appositive phrase. (See our document on appositives at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_appos.html.)
- to separate the subject from the predicate. (See below.)

Each of the following sentences may look like it requires a comma after the opening segment (marked with an x), but the opening segment is really the subject. It's sometimes easy to confuse gerund- or infinitive-phrase subjects like the following with nonessential introductory phrases, so be careful. (For more help with gerunds, see http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_verbals.html.)

- Preparing and submitting his report to the committee for evaluation and possible publication[x] was one of the most difficult tasks Bill had ever attempted.
- To start a new business without doing market research and long-term planning in advance[x] would be foolish.
- Extracting the most profit for the least expenditure on labor and materials[x] is the primary goal of a capitalist.

There is an exercise with an answer key. Click here for the exercise at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_commaintEX1.html.

The following information must remain intact on every handout printed for distribution.

This page is located at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/grammar/g_comma.html

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