

# Commas (Eight Basic Uses)

To better understand the use of the comma, begin by learning the following eight basic uses:

## 1. USE A COMMA TO SEPARATE INDEPENDENT CLAUSES.

Rule: Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, yet, so, or nor, for*) when it joins two complete ideas (independent clauses).

1. He walked down the street, and then he turned the corner.
2. You can go shopping with me, or you can go to a movie alone.

## 2. USE A COMMA AFTER AN INTRODUCTORY CLAUSE OR PHRASE.

Rule: Use a comma after an introductory clause or phrase. A comma tells readers that the introductory clause or phrase has come to a close and that the main part of the sentence is about to begin.

1. When Evan was ready to iron, his cat tripped on the cord.
2. Near a small stream at the bottom of the canyon, park rangers discovered a gold mine.

## 3. USE A COMMA BETWEEN ALL ITEMS IN A SERIES.

Rule: Use a comma to separate each item in a series; a series is a group of three or more items having the same function and form in a sentence.

1. We bought apples, peaches, and bananas today. (**series of words**)
2. Mary promised that she would be a good girl, that she would not bite her brother, and that she would not climb onto the television. (**series of clauses**)
3. The instructor looked through his briefcase, through his desk, and around the office for the lost grade book. (**series of phrases**)

## 4. USE COMMAS TO SET OFF NONRESTRICTIVE CLAUSES.

Rule: Use commas to enclose clauses not essential to the meaning of a sentence. These nonessential clauses are called nonrestrictive. Clauses which are essential are called restrictive. Both restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses may begin with a relative pronoun (such as *who, whom, whose, that, which*). A relative pronoun refers to the noun or pronoun that precedes it.

1. Steven Strom, whose show you like, will host a party next week. (**nonrestrictive**)
2. John, who spent the last three days fishing, is back on the job again. (**nonrestrictive**)
3. The gentleman who is standing by the fireplace is a well-known composer. (**restrictive**)

## 5. USE A COMMA TO SET OFF APPOSITIVES.

Rule: An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun. Appositives offer nonessential information. Nonrestrictive appositives are set off with commas; restrictive appositives are not.

1. Alexander Pope, the Restoration poet, is famous for his monologues. **(appositive)**
2. The poet Pope is famous for his monologues. **(no appositive)**
3. The New York Jets, the underdogs, surprised everyone by winning the Super Bowl. **(appositive)**

## 6. USE A COMMA TO INDICATE DIRECT ADDRESS.

Rule: When a speaker in a sentence names the person to whom he is speaking, this addressing of his audience is called direct address. Direct address is indicated by the use of a comma or commas, depending upon its placement within the sentence.

1. I think, John, you're wrong.
2. John, I think you're wrong.
3. I think you're wrong, John.

## 7. USE COMMAS TO SET OFF DIRECT QUOTATIONS.

Rule: A dialogue is a conversation between two or more people. If the speaker (not the listener) in the conversation is identified, his name, (or the noun or pronoun used to refer to the speaker), and the verb that refers to his speaking are enclosed within commas.

1. Mary said, "I dislike concerts because the music is too loud."
2. "I dislike concerts because the music is too loud," she said.
3. "I dislike concerts," proclaimed Mary, "because the music is too loud."

## 8. USE COMMAS WITH DATES, ADDRESSES, TITLES, AND NUMBERS.

Rules for dates: In dates, the year is set off from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas.  
Ex: On December 12, 1890, orders were sent out for the arrest of Sitting Bull.

Rules for addresses: The elements of an address or place name are separated by commas. A zip code, however, is not preceded by a comma.

Ex: John Lennon was born in Liverpool, England, in 1940.

Ex: Please send the letter to Greg Carvin at 708 Spring Street, Washington, IL 61571.

Rules for titles: If a title follows a name, separate the title from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas.

Ex: Sandra Belinsky, MD, has been appointed to the board.

Rules for numbers: In numbers more than four digits long, use commas to separate the numbers into groups of three, starting from the right. In numbers four digits long, a comma is optional.

Ex: 3,500 [or 3500]

Ex: 100,000

Ex: 6,000,000

**Exercise: Place commas where they belong in the following sentences.**

1. Are you attending my graduation or are you visiting your aunt in Chicago?
2. Marty ate four pancakes two bacon strips and a bowl of grits.
3. The movie although Susan enjoyed it immensely left her in tears.
4. Simon Blake a well-known lawyer may run for governor.
5. If you ever need a ride Judy just let me know.
6. "I'll eat the eggs" said Jane "if you'll eat the bacon."
7. The winner of the contest will receive \$1000000.
8. Although the sky was cloudy no rain was in the forecast.

### Homework

Edit the following paragraph, adding and deleting commas as needed. Refer to the eight comma rules you have learned and be sure you know why you are adding or deleting a comma.

With her mortarboard firmly on her head Tammy, took her place in the graduation procession which was held on May 12 2009. She told her mother Louisa that she wanted to be the first in the family to get a college degree which would also help her get a good job. In her mind either you could get a degree after high school or you could get a degree later but eventually everyone in the United States would need a college degree. When the chance came for her to go to college, and pay for most of it herself she decided it was a chance she could not afford to pass up. Each course she took in her ambitious undergraduate curriculum was another triumph for her. Another 15 weeks of reading staying up late at night writing studying and sitting at uncomfortable desks never scared Tammy. As she marched off the stage Tammy clutched the diploma in one hand, and hurled her mortarboard into the crowd with the other. She yelled "Yes! I made it!" When she got through the crowd and reached her family she screamed "Mom I did it!"

Let's

Put an end to  
sentences!

Language Arts



# What is an end mark?

- An end mark is also known as punctuation, and comes at the end of a sentence. It lets you know when to stop.

- What are the different kinds of end marks?



The period comes at the end of statements and commands.

It is raining today.

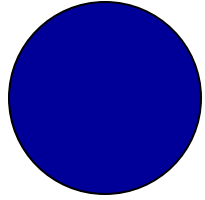
Do not interrupt me.

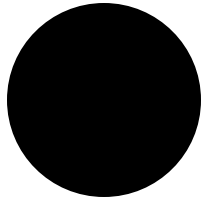
A question mark means something is being asked.

Are you going to lunch?

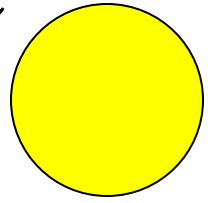
An exclamation mark shows excitement or feeling.

That is a huge dog!





**The period is used for more than just an end mark.**



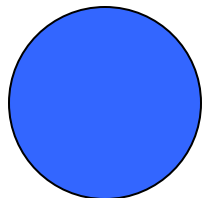
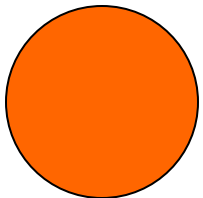
**It is used in abbreviations:**

**1290 College Rd.**

**J. K. Rollings**

**Ms. White**

**Dr. Watson**





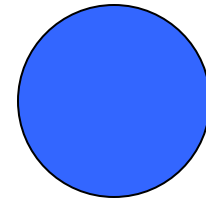
# Where are we going



**exclamation  
mark**



**question  
mark**



**period**

# Correct



Where are we going?

**This sentence is a question, so  
it gets a question mark.**

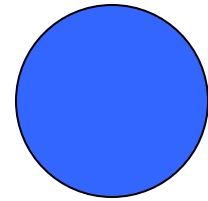
**The phone is ringing**



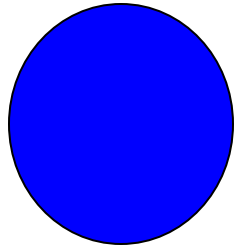
**exclamation  
mark**



**question  
mark**



**period**



Correct

The phone is ringing .

**This sentence is a statement, so  
it gets a period.**

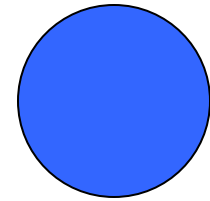
**That car is going to crash**



**exclamation  
mark**



**question  
mark**



**period**

# Correct



**That car is going to crash!**

**This sentence shows excitement,  
so it gets an exclamation mark.**

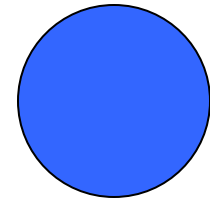
**That tree is going to  
fall on the house**



**exclamation  
mark**



**question  
mark**



**period**

# Correct



That tree is going to fall  
on the house !

**This sentence is a exclamation, so  
it gets an exclamation mark.**



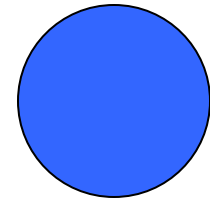
# Put those papers away



**exclamation  
mark**

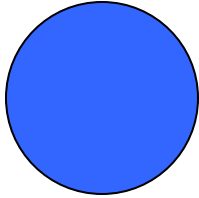


**question  
mark**



**period**

# Correct



**Put those papers away.**

**This sentence is a command,  
so it gets a **period**.**

# Remember,

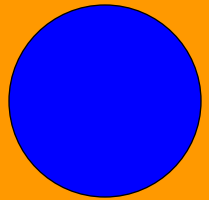
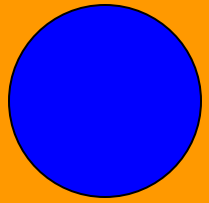
An end mark comes at the END of a sentence, and lets you know when to



There are a few more members of the punctuation family...

[Click here to meet them.](#)

**The colon is made with two periods.**



**It is used for time. 11:35 pm**

**It comes before a list.**

**I will need the following items from**

**the store: bananas, grapes,  
watermelon, and lemons.**





# The comma



**The comma is used to separate a list.**

- **My favorite animals are giraffes, dogs, cats, and birds.**

**It is also used between the date and the year.**

- **It was December 24, 2001.**



# Punctuation Rap

Punctuation rap is a game we play.  
It's fun to do, and we can learn that way.

Take the period, the period; he's not hard to understand.  
You'll find him at the end of a sentence or command.  
He marks abbreviations, shortens words that are long.  
Don't forget the period, he's small but strong.

Question mark, question mark, what did you say?  
He follows a question, that's the only way.

Wow! Awesome! Rad! Hurray!  
The exclamation point is next; he's got something to say.  
He follows something loud, he's excited to play.  
Don't use him too much, he won't be special that way.

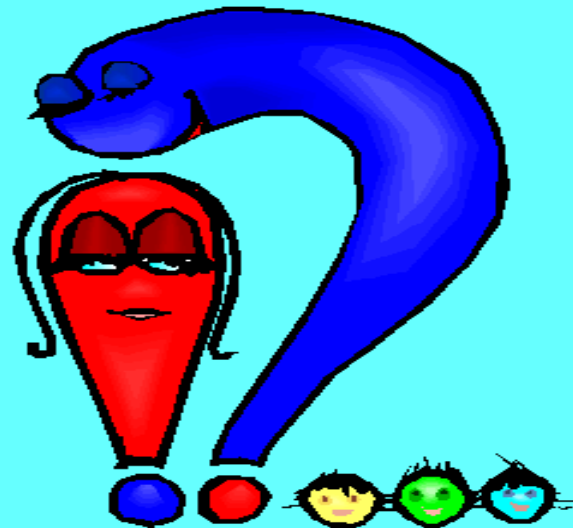
The comma is next, he is used a lot  
He can separate a list of some groceries you bought  
You'll find him in the middle of the year and the date,  
Between two adjectives, or a city and state.

You can join two sentences with a "but" or an "and"  
Just remember the comma, he will give you a hand.  
There is one more place that our comma has been,  
He comes after a clause that tells you when.

The dash-the dash-he's here, then he's gone.  
If you need to make a pause, then you bring him along.

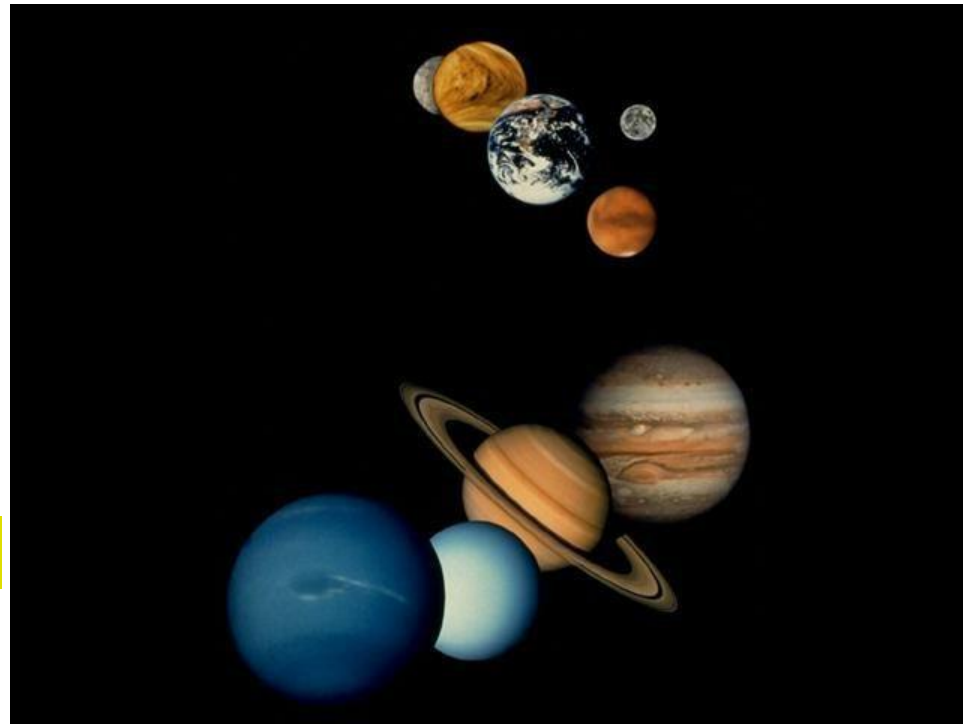
Quotation marks are nosey. They have no reservations  
About hanging around in any conversation,  
You must put quotes around a thing that is said,  
And also a poem or a story you've read.

The colon likes to show a list that will come,  
His brother, the "semi" will not be outdone.  
The semicolon joins two sentences with no, and  
If you have too many commas, he can take a stand.



# Mission Accomplished!!

## We ended those pesky sentences.



## You did great, earthlings!!



# **Crazy Commas**



- Commas have several uses in English and many rules. Hopefully this presentation will help familiarize you with some of the common uses of commas.
- There are than 20 rules for commas but I tried to simplify things for you.

Let's start by looking at some of the common errors that we make with commas.

## Punctuation changes everything

It's raining, cats and dogs!



Cyanide and Happiness © Explosm.net

**Curriculum Vitae**  
**My Interests include:**  
Cooking dogs, shopping, dancing  
reading, watching movies, pic

# Comma Splices

- A **comma splice** is an error caused by joining two strong clauses with only a comma instead of separating the clauses with a conjunction, a semicolon, or a period. A **run-on sentence**, which is incorrect, is created by joining two strong clauses without any punctuation.
- **Incorrect:**  
*Time flies when we are having fun, we are always having fun.* (Comma splice)  
*Time flies when we are having fun we are always having fun.* (Run-on sentence)
- **Correct:**  
*Time flies when we are having fun; we are always having fun.*  
**OR**  
*Time flies when we are having fun, and we are always having fun.* (Comma is optional because both strong clauses are short.)  
**OR**  
*Time flies when we are having fun. We are always having fun.*

Both run-on sentences and comma splices are confusing to readers. It's important that you know how to use a comma.

- Let's start looking at the proper way to use commas.

# 1. The Joining Comma:

## Between Two Independent Clauses

- Use a **comma** between two independent clauses that are joined by a coordinating conjunction such as *and, but, or, nor, for, yet, so*.
- EX. I wanted to knock on the glass to attract attention, **but** I couldn't move.

## 2. To Separate Adjectives

- Use **commas** to separate coordinating adjectives that *equally* modify the same noun. Note: do not use a comma between the last adjective and the noun.
- EX. John's eyes met the ***hard, bright*** lights hanging directly above him.
- NOTE: Add a comma if you can add the word "AND" between the adjectives. (EX: *We stayed at an expensive summer resort.* You would not say *expensive and summer resort*, so don't' add a comma.)

# 3. The Parenthetical Comma:

## To Separate Parenthetical Elements, Explanatory Words, or Set off Appositives

### (AKA: stuff you don't need!)

- Use **commas** to parenthetical elements within a sentence.
- EX. Allison stepped into class, *late as usual*, and sat down.
  
- Use **commas** to enclose an explanatory word or phrase.
- EX. They stood together, *away from the pile of stones in the corner*, and their jokes were quiet.
  
- Appositives: A specific kind of explanatory word or phrase called an **appositive** identifies or renames a preceding noun or pronoun. An appositive has information that **could be taken OUT and the sentence would still make sense**. An appositive is a **noun** or **noun phrase** that **renames another noun right beside it**. The appositive can be a short or long combination of words.
- EX. Benson, *our spunky and enthusiastic Yorkshire terrier*, joined our family on my sister's birthday.



## 4. To Set off Nouns of Address

- Use a **comma** to set off a noun of address (person being spoken to).
- EX. **Barry**, how long does your paper have to be?

## 5. Between Items in a Series

- Use **commas** to separate individual words, phrases, or clauses in a series (a series contains at least three items).
- EX. I'd never eaten ***meat, vegetables, and a salad*** all in the same meal.
- EX. I ***took her for walks, read her stories, and make up games*** for her to play.

## 6. After an Introductory Phrase or Clause

- Use a **comma** after an introductory phrase.
- EX. ***Determined to finish the sweater by Thanksgiving,*** my grandmother knits night and day.
- NOTE: You may omit the comma if the introductory phrase is short.
- EX. ***Before breakfast*** my grandmother knits.
  
- Use a **comma** after an introductory adverb clause.
- EX. ***After the practice was over,*** Tina walked home.
- NOTE: A comma is used if an adverb clause follows the main clause and begins with *although, even though, while,* or another conjunction expressing contrast.
- EX. Tina walked home, ***even though it was raining very hard.***

## 7. To Set Off Dates or Items in Addresses

- Use **commas** to set off items in a date.
- EX. He began working out on ***December 1, 1999,*** but quit by ***May 1, 2000.***
  
- Use **commas** to set off items in an address.
- EX. Mail the box to ***Friends of Wildlife, Box 402, Spokane, Washington 20077.***
- NOTE: No comma is place between the state and zip code.

## 8. To Set Off Dialogue

- Use **commas** to set off the speaker's exact words from the rest of the sentence.
- EX. ***"It's like we have our own government,"*** adds Tanya, a 17-year-old-squatter.

# 9. The Interjecting Comma: To Set Off Interjections or Interruptions

- Use **commas** to separate an interjection or weak exclamation from the rest of the sentence.
- EX. **Hey**, how am I supposed to know when the test is over?
- EX. **Okay**, now what do I do?
  
- Use commas to set off a word, phrase, or a clause that interrupts the movement of a sentence. You can identify this type of phrase because: 1. They can often be deleted without changing the meaning of a sentence. 2. They may be placed nearly anywhere in the sentence without changing its meaning.
- EX. For me, **well**, it's just a good thing that tomorrow's Saturday.
- EX. **As a general rule**, the safest way to cross the street is after looking both ways.

# 10. In Numbers

- Use **commas** to separate numerals in large numbers in order to distinguish the hundreds, thousands, millions, and so forth.
- EX. ***1,101***      ***25,000***      ***7,345,030***

# I realize that we just reviewed A LOT of rules for commas.

- Don't stress. This is complicated.
- Before you add a comma in your next sentence, think about why you need to add it. (For example, can you think about why I needed a comma in this sentence or in the last one?)
- Try to avoid using commas instead of periods or semi-colons.



Any questions?

# Standard Punctuation

Do I need a  
***comma***?

Or do I need a  
***semicolon***?



This presentation covers standard punctuation: ***end marks, commas, semicolons, and apostrophes.***



**Punctuation items on an  
objective test might look  
like these ...**

# Sample Item 1

As we got out of the car we could smell the  
delicious chicken and rice that Grandma was  
cooking for dinner.

- A. car, we
- B. chicken, and
- C. rice, that
- D. No change is necessary.

Do you need a **comma** after **car**, **chicken**, or **rice**?



# Sample Item 1

As we got out of the car, we could smell the  
delicious chicken and rice that Grandma was  
cooking for dinner.

- A. **car, we**
- B. chicken, and
- C. rice, that
- D. No change is necessary.

**Exactly!** You need to connect the introductory clause.



# Sample Item 2

- A. Since Grandma wasnt looking, Julie filled the dogs bowls with leftovers from the meal.
- B. Since Grandma wasn't looking, Julie filled the dogs' bowls with leftover's from the meal.
- C. Since Grandma wasn't looking, Julie filled the dogs' bowls with leftovers from the meal.

An item might have **3** or **4** **versions** of a sentence, and you will have to choose the letter where **all punctuation** is **correct**.



# Sample Item 2

- A. Since Grandma wasnt looking, Julie filled the dogs bowls with leftovers from the meal.
- B. Since Grandma wasn't looking, Julie filled the dogs' bowls with leftover's from the meal.
- C. Since Grandma wasn't looking, Julie filled the dogs' bowls with leftovers from the meal.**

Notice that the ***apostrophes*** are all ***correct*** in version ***C.***






# End Marks

- Use the **period** [ . ] to end **statements**.  
Jasmine ate a chocolate-broccoli muffin.
- Use the **question mark** [ ? ] when asking a **question**.  
Did Jasmine eat a chocolate-broccoli muffin?
- Use—not **overuse**—the **exclamation mark** [ ! ] to signify **excitement** or **emphasis**.  
Oh, no! Jasmine ate a chocolate-broccoli muffin!



Do I have  
broccoli stuck in  
my teeth? I  
have an  
appointment at  
the dentist's!

One exclamation mark *per essay* is a good average.



But I really *love!* I  
mean *love!* the  
*exclamation*  
*mark!!!* I want to  
use it all the *time!!!*  
It's *me!!!*

One exclamation mark *per essay* is a good average.



But I really *love!* I  
mean *love!* the  
*exclamation*  
*mark!* I want to  
use it in the *me!!!*  
It's *me!!!*

# Commas, Part 1

- Use commas to connect ***introductory***, ***interrupting***, and some ***concluding*** material.
- Interrupting material will include a comma ***before*** and a comma ***after***.

Jasmine will pass the comma test, ***without a doubt***.



***You*** should know commas as well as ***I*** do!

# Commas, Part 2

- Use a comma with a **coordinating conjunction** to connect two sentences.
- Coordinating conjunctions = **and, but, for, or, nor, yet, and so.**

Jasmine will pass the comma test, **but** Slacker Sam will not.



You have to **study** if you want to do **well!**

# Commas, Part 3

- Use **and** alone to connect **two** items.
- Use commas and an **and** to connect **three or more** items.

Jasmine will buy a bag of potato chips, a hotdog, **and** a soda



**Hard work**  
deserves a  
**reward!**

# Semicolon

- Use the semicolon [ ; ] to connect two main clauses.
- Do **not** use the semicolon to introduce a list. The comma with a transition like **such as** or **including**, or the colon [ : ] does that job.

Jasmine prefers classes that require her to write:  
Intro to Humanities, Abnormal Psychology, and  
US Government.

But I **excel** at  
**punctuation!**





# Apostrophe

- Use the apostrophe [ ' ] with an **s** to show **possession**: Jasmine's pen, the cat's eyes, the professor's frowns
- Or use the apostrophe to indicate the letters/spaces removed in a **contraction**: she'd, can't, should've

We can't cheat from Jasmine's punctuation quiz because she's absent today!



**Ha!** Dentist  
appointment!

# Quick Test, Part 1

**Directions:** In the items that follow, choose the option that corrects an error in the underlined portion(s). If no error exists, choose “No change is necessary.”



Show me  
what ***you***  
***know.***

# Item 1

Although Raymond will eat a grasshopper, he  
A B  
refuses all green vegetables such as peas,  
C  
spinach, and even cucumbers.

- A. Although, Raymond
- B. grasshopper he
- C. vegetables, such
- D. No change is necessary.

# Item 1

Although Raymond will eat a grasshopper, he

A

B

refuses all green vegetables, such as peas,

C

spinach, and even cucumbers.

A. Although, Raymond

B. grasshopper he

**C. vegetables, such**

D. No change is necessary.





# Item 3

Francine has five chair's but six quests coming  
A B  
for Thanksgiving dinner; she hopes that old Uncle

Ross remembers to bring an extra.  
C

- A. chairs
- B. guest's
- C. remember's
- D. No change is necessary.

# Item 3

Francine has five chairs but six guests coming  
A B  
for Thanksgiving dinner; she hopes that old Uncle

Ross remembers to bring an extra.  
C

- A. chairs
- B. guest's
- C. remember's
- D. No change is necessary.



## Item 4

Roseanne washed the piles of dirty dishes, while

A

Maria vacuumed the filthy rug; they tried to

B

complete a month's worth of housekeeping in a

C

single hour.

A. dishes while

B. tried, to

C. months

D. No change is necessary.

## Item 4

Roseanne washed the piles of dirty dishes while

A

Maria vacuumed the filthy rug; they tried to

B

complete a month's worth of housekeeping in a

C

single hour.

**A. dishes while**

B. tried, to

C. months

D. No change is necessary.

# Item 5

Audrey can't leave work early, and Peggy wont  
A B  
help with the cupcakes, so I guess I'll have to do  
C  
all the baking myself.

- A. cant
- B. won't
- C. III
- D. No change is necessary.

# Item 5

Audrey can't leave work early, and Peggy won't  
A B  
help with the cupcakes, so I guess I'll have to do  
C  
all the baking myself.

- A. cant
- B. won't**
- C. III
- D. No change is necessary.

# Item 6

During our picnic, we were tormented by

**A**

insects: ants swarming into the potato

**B**

salad, bees buzzing by our ears, and a katydid

**C**

jumping into Henry's open mouth.

- A. picnic we
- B. insects; ants
- C. salad bees
- D. No change is necessary.

# Item 6

During our picnic, we were tormented by

**A**

insects: ants swarming into the potato

**B**

salad, bees buzzing by our ears, and a katydid

**C**

jumping into Henry's open mouth.

A. picnic we

B. insects; ants

C. salad bees

**D. No change is necessary.**

# Quick Test, Part 2

**Directions:** In the items that follow, choose the sentence that is correctly punctuated.



Try a  
***different***  
***type*** of  
***item.***

# Item 7

- A. Roger spent three hours writing Christinas paper.
- B. Roger spent three hour's writing Christina's paper.
- C. Roger spent three hours writing Christina's paper.



# Item 7

- A. Roger spent three hours writing Christinas paper.
- B. Roger spent three hour's writing Christina's paper.
- C. Roger spent three hours writing Christina's paper.**

## Item 8

- A. When the crickets and the frogs sing Luis cannot get a good nights sleep.
- B. When the crickets and the frogs sing, Luis cannot get a good night's sleep.
- C. When the cricket's and the frog's sing, Luis cannot get a good nights sleep.

## Item 8

- A. When the crickets and the frogs sing Luis cannot get a good nights sleep.
- B. When the crickets and the frogs sing, Luis cannot get a good night's sleep.**
- C. When the cricket's and the frog's sing, Luis cannot get a good nights sleep.

# Item 9

- A. Before you start painting the walls, you'll need a drop cloth and a ladder.
- B. Before you start painting the walls you'll need a drop cloth, and a ladder.
- C. Before you start painting the walls, you'll need a drop cloth, and a ladder.

# Item 9

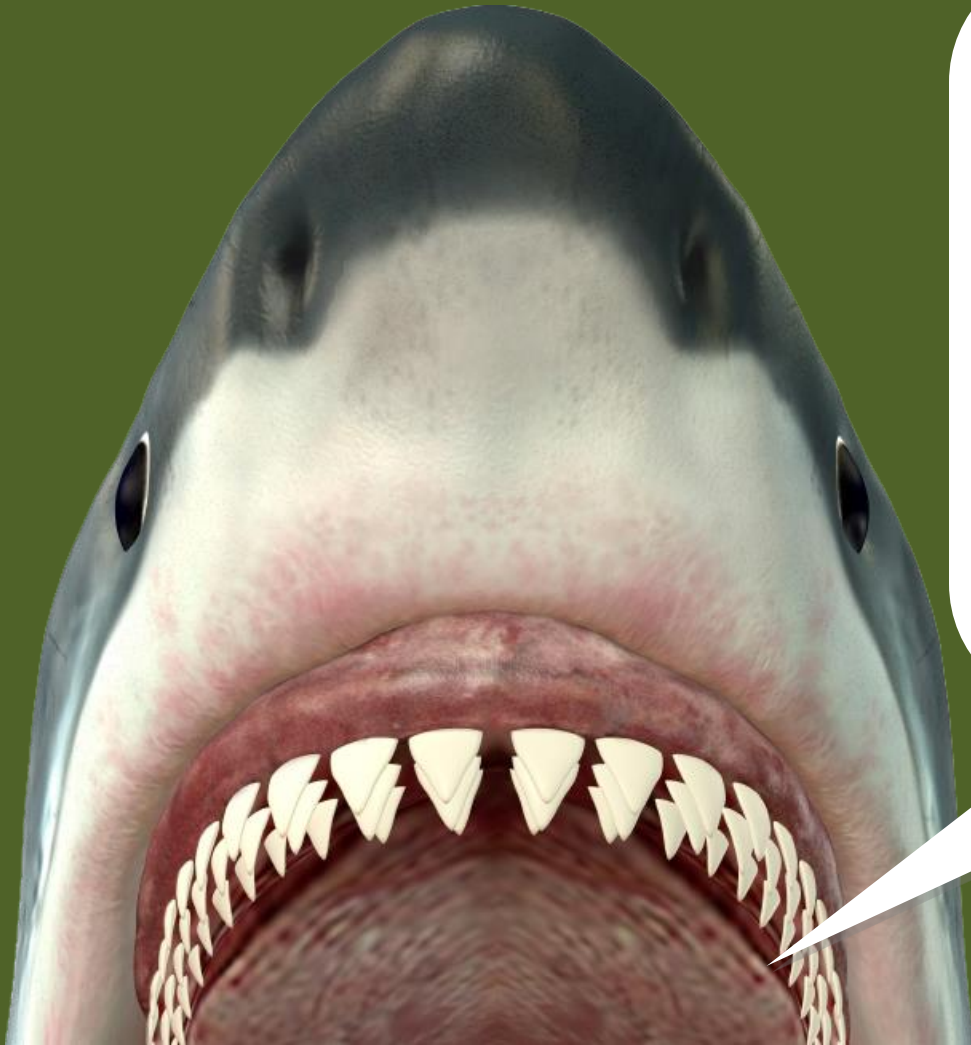
- A. Before you start painting the walls, you'll need a drop cloth and a ladder.**
- B. Before you start painting the walls you'll need a drop cloth, and a ladder.
- C. Before you start painting the walls, you'll need a drop cloth, and a ladder.

# Item 10

- A. Darlene laughed at Jeb's haircut; it looked, as if goat's had grazed on his head.
- B. Darlene laughed at Jeb's haircut; it looked as if goats had grazed on his head.
- C. Darlene laughed at Jeb's haircut, it looked as if goats had grazed on his's head.

# Item 10

- A. Darlene laughed at Jeb's haircut; it looked, as if goat's had grazed on his head.
- B. Darlene laughed at Jeb's haircut; it looked as if goats had grazed on his head.**
- C. Darlene laughed at Jeb's haircut, it looked as if goats had grazed on his's head.



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