

Commas Level 2

Name: _____

Date: _____

How to Guide

Skills Check

Rate how confident you feel about the skills tested in this section:

Skill	Not a clue!	I know a little	I feel okay with this	I feel quite confident	I feel very confident
Use commas in compound sentences					
Use commas in complex sentences					
Use the Oxford comma					
Identify mistakes with commas					

When you have finished the booklet, use a different colour to mark your confidence levels again.

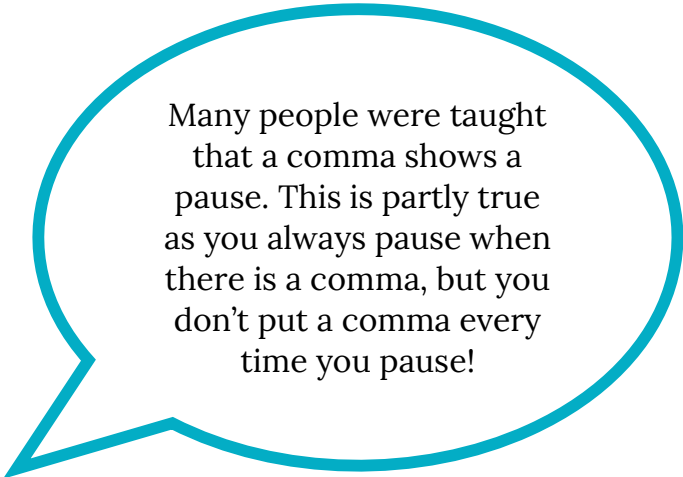
Commas

Introduction

There are a number of marks for using correct punctuation in the exam. Using commas is one of the skills people find most difficult. People often say that they were taught in quite a confusing way at school and have always been a bit unsure about where to put them.

At L2, you will be expected to show you can use commas correctly in your writing. At lower levels, they will look at whether you use commas correctly in lists of words, but at L2 this is expected knowledge, so you won't gain marks for using commas in lists. However, if you make a mistake in a list, you will still lose marks.

Commas are used frequently in compound and complex sentences, so it is recommended that you read the guide on Sentence Types before this one so that you understand the different types of sentences.



Many people were taught that a comma shows a pause. This is partly true as you always pause when there is a comma, but you don't put a comma every time you pause!

Commas in Compound Sentences

A compound sentence links two complete sentences together using a conjunction. Many people remember the acronym FANBOYS to help them identify these conjunctions

for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

In order for you to need the comma, the part before the conjunction and the part after the conjunction must make complete sense on their own. The comma goes before the conjunction.

Examples

Remember, the bit before the comma and the bit after the conjunction must make sense on their own.

I had to go out for some shopping, and Dan had to go to fill the car up with petrol.

There was a long debate about whether to allow the new plans to go through, so the council decided to put it to a vote.

Try it Out

Question 1

Tick the compound sentences that use the comma correctly and cross the ones that use it incorrectly.

- a) I needed to buy some stationery, and a filing cabinet.
- b) The walk to the meeting was longer than expected, yet the time flew by very quickly.
- c) I'd like to take part in online meetings but, I'm not very good with technology.
- d) I am writing to complain about the service, it was terrible.
- e) I feel very strongly about the environment, but I realise not everyone feels the same way.

Commas in Complex Sentences

A complex sentence has one part that makes sense when read on its own (independent clause) and one part that does not (dependent clause). Commas are often used to join the parts together.

If you start a sentence with an introductory word or phrase, there will be a natural pause in the sentence. The comma shows where that pause is. Here are some examples you could use:

When	As soon as	If
As	Just as	While
Before	After	Since

This is the part that won't make sense on its own. The part after the comma will make sense on its own.

Examples

If I see her at the meeting tonight, I'll give her the message.

When I got home, I had dinner and went to bed.

As it grew darker, they became more scared.

Try it Out

Question 2 - Add the commas into these sentences.

- If you don't refund my money I'll take my complaint further.
- As many people don't believe the new development will bring more tourists to the area we have decided to put the plans on hold.
- While you were fetching the files I organised the seating arrangements.
- When the meeting starts I want you to begin the slide show.

If you put the independent clause first, then you don't need a comma.

Read the example sentences out loud. You'll notice that you don't need to pause in the examples below, so you don't need the comma.

When	As soon as	If
As	Just as	While
Before	After	Since

Examples

I got a huge shock, when I saw the mess. **X**

I got a huge shock when I saw the mess. ✓

I'll tackle the report, as soon as I receive the data from the marketing department. **X**

I'll tackle the report as soon as I receive the data from the marketing department. ✓

Try it Out

Question 3 – Three sentences below use commas correctly and three do not. Tick the correct sentences.

- a) I don't like Karen, as she's so bossy.
- b) When I get to Paris I'll give you a ring.
- c) We will miss the train if you don't hurry up.
- d) Nick has been taking the bus as his car broke down last week.
- e) They arrived just as we were leaving.
- f) As it was getting late we decided to go home.

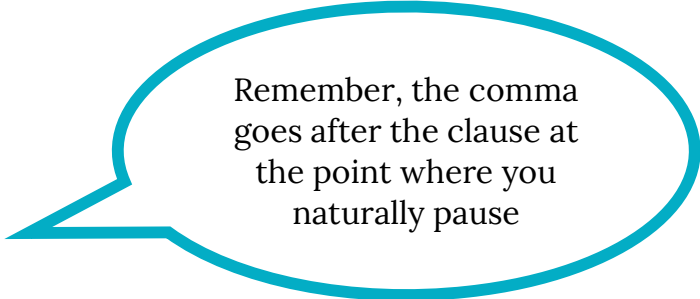
Dependent clauses can start with a range of different words. Here are some other words or phrases you can use.

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| ▶ after | ▶ just in case | ▶ while |
| ▶ although | ▶ now that | ▶ why |
| ▶ as | ▶ once | ▶ provided that |
| ▶ as soon as | ▶ only if | ▶ rather than |
| ▶ because | ▶ until | ▶ since |
| ▶ before | ▶ when | ▶ so that |
| ▶ by the time | ▶ whenever | ▶ than |
| ▶ even if | ▶ where | ▶ that |
| ▶ if | ▶ whereas | ▶ though |
| ▶ in case | ▶ wherever | ▶ even though |
| ▶ in order that | ▶ whether | ▶ every time |
| ▶ in the event that | ▶ whether or not | |

Try it Out

Question 4

Pick four of the starting words or phrases from the box above and construct complex sentences about the topic of sport.



Remember, the comma goes after the clause at the point where you naturally pause

1)

2)

3)

4)

Additional Information

A pair of commas shows additional information that could be taken away from the sentence and what's left would make sense on its own.

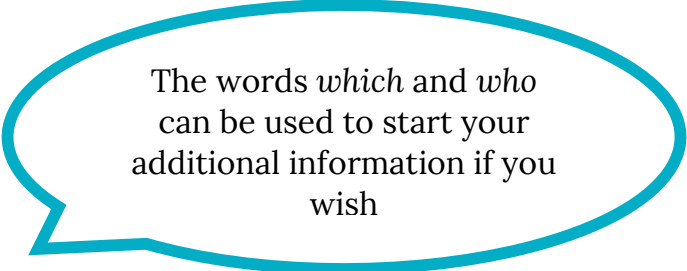
My favourite actor is Chris Hemsworth, who plays Thor, because I think he's really funny.

You could remove *who plays Thor* and the sentence would still make sense.

My favourite actor is Chris Hemsworth because I think he's really funny.

Try it Out

Question 5 - Add in the pairs of commas to the sentences below.



The words *which* and *who* can be used to start your additional information if you wish

- a) I wore my blue jacket the one I bought at Next to my job interview.

- b) Zoe wrote to the council to complain about the pothole on Main Street near the bank because she was worried it could cause an accident.

- c) John won a silver in his category under 13s and Abid got the gold medal.

Question 6 - Add your own additional information inside the pair of commas below.

- a) I would like to see a new shopping centre, _____, built on the wasteland outside of the town.

- b) My favourite part of the trip was the second day, _____, as we had plenty of time to see the sights.

The additional information can also go at the end of a sentence. This means only one comma is needed. The additional information is likely to start with which, who, that

Examples

James tripped over the cable, which had been left lying across the floor.

We need to do some further investigations, which will extend our timeline.

It is important the part at the end is additional to the meaning of the sentence. If not, then don't use the comma. Here are some examples where a comma is not needed as all the information is important to the meaning.

Examples

They needed to fetch the car that had broken down.

We need to close the section which has been contaminated.

Question 7- Add your own additional information after the commas below.

a) The customer complained about their item being broken,

b) It is unlikely we will complete the report,

c) I really enjoyed our trip to Italy,

Commas After Introductory Words

If your sentence starts with an introductory word or phrase, you place a comma after that word or phrase. Again, this would indicate a pause in the sentence. Notice the comma after *again* in the previous sentence? The comma tells you to pause after saying it to separate it from the main idea of the sentence.

General Words

However,
Furthermore,
Therefore,
Suddenly,
Amazingly,
Shockingly,

Time Based Words

Firstly,
Secondly,
Finally,
Next,

General Phrases

In next month's
edition,
Next week,
After the holidays,
After a while,
If so,
As you know,

Try it Out

Question 8

Pick one word or phrase from each box to use at the start of three sentences about the topic of holidays.

1)

2)

3)

The Oxford Comma

Generally, there is no comma before the last item in a list.

The venues are Leeds, Bradford and Manchester.

The Oxford comma is a comma that goes before the *and* at the end of a list and helps to clarify the meaning.

The departments needed for the open day are sales, purchasing, marketing and branding, and HR.

This helps us to know that marketing and branding are all one department and that HR is a separate department.

The departments needed for the open day are sales, purchasing, marketing and branding and HR.

Without the comma before the *and* we might be confused about whether there was one big department that dealt with marketing, branding and HR or whether marketing was one department and HR and branding was another.

Try it Out

Question 9

Write two sentences of your own that use the Oxford comma to help clarify the meaning of the sentence.

1)

2)

Comma Splicing

Most of the mistakes people make with commas are due to comma splicing. This is when two complete sentences (independent clauses) are joined together (spliced) using a comma **without** a conjunction.

I'm asking all my friends to help me raise money for charity, so I'm inviting you all to take part in a sponsored walk. ✓

This sentence uses a comma and a conjunction correctly. If the conjunction is removed, we have a comma splice. This is incorrect use of a comma.

I'm asking all my friends to help me raise money for charity, I'm inviting you all to take part in a sponsored walk. X

If you find you have made a mistake with a comma splice, you can either add in a conjunction or use a full stop to make two sentences.

Try it Out

Question 10 – Tick or cross the sentences below to show whether they are correct or whether they are comma splices.

- a) My college has many facilities for disabled students, they spent £1 million on updating the campus last year.

- b) I would like to complain about the service received at your restaurant, and I would like a personal apology.

- c) Unfortunately, I could not submit my details via your website, but I did send them by email using your contact form.

- d) Our initial investigation showed the customer was at fault, we recommend that you do not offer any compensation.