

Commas and Apostrophes

Comma use varies in the publishing world. Basic rules for academic papers are:

- 1** Use a comma after a transitional word, phrase, or dependent clause that introduces or modifies a sentence.

Finally, the measure was passed in the Senate.

As shown in figure 3., readership began to drop off sharply in 2004.

Because the profits were higher, no one expressed alarm.

Although all of us read the same words on the page, we respond differently.

When possible, the birds were observed three times per day.

Wrong:

Although, the vote was too close to call beforehand.

Fat molecules, do pass through cell membranes easily.

Being centrally located, is the key to the company's success.

- 2** Use a comma after a word or phrase that precedes and describes the subject of the sentence. (The subject is underlined.)

Panicked, the townspeople fled into the night.

Reading by lamplight, he devoured the classics at an early age.

Famous as a place of learning, Oxford University has had its share of tragedy.

- 3** Use a comma before a comment or qualification tagged on the end of a sentence.

The data suggest that we should continue the treatment, not end it.

Bulgaria attacked its neighbor, despite international outcry.

Depression is a serious illness, often drawing its victims toward suicide.

- 4** Use a comma between each item in a series.

In this paper I discuss the short stories, essays, and novels of Hemingway.

All students should read the chapter, take notes, and answer the study questions.

- 5** Use a comma before *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *yet*, *so*, and *for* when they connect two independent clauses.

By now word has gotten around, and no one wants to hear what he has to say.

The report surprised them, but ultimately the committee accepted it.

- 6** Use a comma before and after a word or phrase that interrupts the flow of the sentence.

The bond market will, therefore, react quickly to such news.

American diplomats, led by Secretary Powell, faced new challenges.

Smithson spoke, against the advice of her attorneys, to the press.

Apostrophe use is more standardized than comma use. Common rules for apostrophe use are:

1 Add **'s** to the word or phrase that names the possessor of something.

the book's cover	democracy's spread
the Chief Executive Officer's salary	her new sister-in-law's recipe

- If the last sound of the possessor is [z] add ' only.

Mrs. Hayes' lecture	all the dogs' fur
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- If the last letter of the possessor is the s that means 'plural' add ' only.

my cuffs' edges	all the cats' fur
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2 Use an apostrophe when one or more letters are omitted in a contraction.

can't	for cannot	it's	for it is
you're	for you are	the '60s	for the 1960s
there's	for there is	what's	for what is

3 Use apostrophes to show plural of a letter, abbreviation, or number (but not a date) used as a word.

Mind your p's and q's.
 I enjoy working with T.A.'s
 There are four 20's in the wallet.
 She began campaigning in the 1980s.

Do not use apostrophes in possessive pronouns that end in **s**.

his bicycle	not <i>his' bicycle</i>	Find its lid.	not <i>it's</i>
It is hers.	not <i>her's</i>	It was yours.	not <i>your's</i>
These are ours.	not <i>our's</i>	This is theirs.	not <i>their's</i>

Do not use apostrophes in plurals of common nouns and proper names.

Wrong: *All the cat's and dog's are playing together.*
There are four Frank's in the class.
Correct: *The senators voted in favor of the bill.*

Do not use apostrophes in verb endings.

Wrong: *When one hire's an employee, one must interview carefully.*
The essay read's well, but it isn't accurate.
Correct: *He edits his papers carefully.*