

Avoiding Common Comma Mistakes

Why should I check for comma errors?

Improperly placed commas can break up a sentence into illogical parts and can cause confusion for the reader.

Do not place a comma...

⇒ **After a main clause when the subordinate clause follows it**

The only time this is appropriate is if you are trying to show extreme contrast.

This should look like...

- *My ride arrived, while I was still eating.*

- ***My ride arrived while I was still eating.***

⇒ **To set off essential elements of the sentence**

For example, a comma should never precede *that* statements, because *that* statements are always essential information. If information is essential, it cannot be removed from the sentence without altering the meaning of the sentence.

- *He is dreaming, that he can fly.*

- ***He is dreaming that he can fly.***

⇒ **To separate the subject from the verb**

In English, these numbers require hyphens in writing.

- *The most valuable attribute of an athlete, is quick reflexes.*

- ***The most valuable attribute of an athlete is quick reflexes.***

⇒ **To separate the elements in a compound predicate**

A prefix is placed at the beginning of a word to modify or change its meaning. Usually, hyphenated prefixes are used to separate two consecutive vowels to avoid confusion.

- *I quickly turned the corner, and ran into a glass door.*

- ***I quickly turned the corner and ran into a glass door.***

⇒ **Between the elements in a compound subject or object**

This rule is usually used to designate an action.

- *The woman on the phone said that the job was still available, and that the manager wanted to interview me.*

- ***The woman on the phone said that the job was still available and that the manager wanted to interview me.***

*For further explanation of these commas rules, reference the Purdue OWL at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/02/>