

Lesson: Commas with Nonessential Elements

Learning Target

- Use commas correctly to set off nonessential elements.

Commas are used to set off certain nonessential grammatical elements, such as nonrestrictive appositives, interrupting elements, and introductory elements.

Nonrestrictive Appositives and Appositive Phrases

If an appositive or appositive phrase is **nonrestrictive** (that is, not essential to the basic meaning of the sentence), it is set off with commas. If leaving out the appositive or appositive phrase would change the meaning of the sentence, it is not set off.

The American author **Madeleine L'Engle** wrote *A Wrinkle in Time*. [The appositive *Madeleine L'Engle* is essential to the basic meaning of the sentence. It **restricts** the meaning of author. Without the appositive, the reader does not know which American author is meant.]

Madeleine L'Engle, **an American author**, wrote *A Wrinkle in Time*. [The appositive *an American author* adds extra information; it is nonessential.]

Interrupting Elements

Nouns of **direct address** are set off:

Isabelle, have you read *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*?

Have you read *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, **Isabelle**?

Parenthetical expressions are usually set off:

By the way, that's my favorite book.

The books, **as I recall**, include interesting ideas about time travel.

Introductory Elements

When **yes**, **no**, **well**, or a **mild interjection** begins a sentence, it is set off with a comma:

Yes, I have read that book. **Boy**, did I love it!

When a **long prepositional phrase** or a **series of two or more short prepositional phrases** begins a sentence, it is set off with a comma:

Of all the books that you have read this year, which is your favorite?

In the library at our school, there is a book that I have read at least five times.

When an **adverb clause** begins a sentence, it is set off with a comma:

When I read, it is as if I am visiting another world.

Because the library is closed on Thursday, we plan to go on Friday.

Lesson: Commas with Nonessential Elements (continued)

Other Nonessential Elements

Nonessential participial phrases (those that add information that is not necessary to the basic meaning of the sentence) are set off with commas:

Sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner, Meg's family learns of a serious threat to the world.

Charles Wallace, **reciting an ancient Irish rune**, summons the unicorn Gaudior.

Nonessential adjectival clauses are set off with commas:

Meg's family, **who are sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner**, learns of a serious threat to the world.

Charles Wallace, **who recites an ancient Irish rune**, summons the unicorn Gaudior.

Check Your Understanding

Read the following sentences. Add any missing commas. If a sentence is already correct as is, write *Correct*.

1. We have had our boat, a sixteen-foot aluminum canoe, for over twenty years.
2. On the surface of the bay, you can sometimes see fish jumping.
3. There's a particular kind of fish, the mullet, that frequently jumps out of the water.
4. Standing on the pier, Walter saw a jellyfish.
5. Although we applied sunscreen, we still got a little sunburned.
6. Did you see the jetty, Chris?
7. Yes, we walked there yesterday.
8. Watching the sunset, Frank saw a flock of pelicans fly overhead.
9. My friend Eliana likes stargazing. *Correct*
10. By the way, I hope we get to camp on the beach.