

# COMMA TIP 1

**Use a comma to separate an introductory element from the main clause that follows.**

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**Main clauses** will often have single words, **phrases**, or other **clauses** that introduce them. In the table below are common introductory elements.

| INTRODUCTORY ELEMENT   | DEFINITION  | EXAMPLES   |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Prepositional phrase   | Preposition + optional description + noun                                 | <i>at</i> midnight, <i>in</i> Count Dracula's castle, <i>under</i> Fred's nose, <i>on</i> the other hand, etc.   |
| Participle phrase      | Verb + <i>ing</i><br>Verb + <i>ed</i><br>Irregular form of irregular verb | <i>slurping</i> up the last few drops of the chocolate shake, <i>wheezing</i> like a cat with a hairball, <i>bumped</i> from the list, <i>broken</i> by the news, etc. |
| Infinitive phrase      | <i>To</i> + verb  | <i>to avoid</i> being eaten by a Great White shark, <i>to be</i> perfectly honest, <i>to conclude</i> , etc.   |
| Appositive             | Noun phrase renaming another noun   | the best <i>student</i> in Professor Wright's biology class, my <i>roommate</i> with the worst table manners, the shyest <i>boy</i> in class, etc.                     |
| Noun of direct address | Name of the person (or other living being) receiving the information      | Ned, Mr. President, Mom, Jo-Jo, etc.   |

| INTRODUCTORY ELEMENT | DEFINITION  | EXAMPLES   |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Adverb               | Type of modifier (often ends in <i>ly</i> )                   | meanwhile, unfortunately, however, etc.  |
| Subordinate clause   | Subordinate conjunction + subject + verb                      | <i>when</i> the computer began to beep wildly, <i>unless</i> you have heard otherwise, <i>even though</i> I warned him, etc. |
| Speaker tag          | Subject + verb (identifies the speaker of a direct quotation) | Laverne shouted, Professor Nordstrom stated, my mother asserted, etc.  |

Use a comma to connect the *introductory element* to the main clause that follows. Follow this pattern:

**INTRODUCTORY ELEMENT** + , + **MAIN CLAUSE** .

**At midnight in Count Dracula's castle up on the hill,** you can hear Diana Ross crooning from the stereo. (Introductory prepositional phrase)

**Slurping up the last few drops of the chocolate shake,** Beverly was struck by lightning and toasted as crisp as a French fry. (Introductory participle phrase)

**To avoid being eaten by a Great White shark,** Roy rubs garlic on his body before entering the surf. (Introductory infinitive phrase)

**The best student in Dr. Wright's biology class,** Lakesha happily dissects every frog and pig fetus. (Introductory appositive)

**Ned,** were you the idiot who sprinkled sesame seeds on my strawberry cupcakes? (Introductory noun of direct address)

**Meanwhile,** the angry bees noticed Warren hiding in the bushes.  
(Introductory adverb acting as a transition)

**When the computer began to beep wildly,** Donald grabbed the monitor and threw it out the window. (Introductory subordinate clause)

**Laverne shouted,** "There's a giant spider tangled in your hair!"  
(Introductory speaker tag)

## QUICK TEST

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**Directions:** Add commas where they are necessary.

1. Because she is short Francine loves to go food shopping with Rachel, a tall friend. Strolling down the aisles Francine asks Rachel to grab packages of imported crackers and boxes of high-fiber cereal, items that are always too high to reach.
2. On top of the computer monitor in the bedroom a collection of stuffed unicorns supervises the work Lori completes at the keyboard below.
3. Akram has a problem hitting the snooze button on his alarm over and over. To get to his first class on time Akram frequently eats a donut in the car, getting crumbs all over the seat of his new vehicle.
4. Pablo walked all the way across campus before he noticed the lightness of his book bag. Suddenly he realized that his heavy chemistry text was on the backseat of his car.
5. In English class no one wants to sit next to Eli because he is always smacking his gum loudly. Moreover he nervously swings his leg, kicking people in the thighs, shins, and ankles.

