

Using Commas to Clarify Meaning



Retrieval Activity

Can you give the reason that commas have been used in each of these sentences? Think back to our previous work on speech, lists, clauses and adverbials. Answers on next slide.

1. Max had bought cheese, pears, sausage rolls and pickle, especially for the picnic.

2. Artem, who was only 9 years old, was a better piano player than many students twice his age.

3. The rain was certainly heavy, but the Sun was suggesting it hadn't gone for good.

4. "I was amazed at how much I had got done in the day," she said.

5. When they finally reached their destination, they realised he had been right all along!

6. The artist, who was a bit of a dreamer, sat and painted the sea.

Can you give the reason that commas have been used in each of these sentences?
Think back to our previous work on speech, lists, clauses and adverbials.

Max had bought cheese, pears, sausage rolls and pickle, especially for the picnic.

The commas are used to separate items in a list.

Artem, who was only 9 years old, was a better piano player than many students twice his age.

The commas are used to demarcate a relative clause (an added clause of extra information that begins with a relative pronoun). The commas are needed because the relative clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

The rain was certainly heavy, but the Sun was suggesting it hadn't gone for good.
3. The rain was certainly heavy, but the Sun was suggesting it hadn't gone for good.

The comma separates two halves of a compound sentence.

"I was amazed at how much I had got done in the day," she said.

This comma is used to indicate the end of what is actually being said in the sentence.

When they finally reached their destination, they realised he had been right all along!

This comma is used to separate the main clause and subordinate clause.

The artist, who was a bit of a dreamer, sat and painted the sea.

The comma in this sentence demarcates the relative clause and makes the meaning clearer.

You have already learned about using commas in these situations:

To separate items in a list.

After a fronted adverbial.

To indicate extra information in a sentence.

After direct speech.

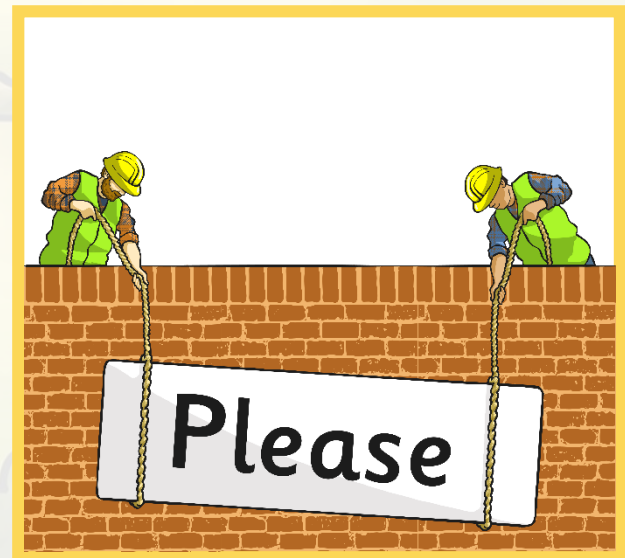
This lesson may call on your knowledge of general comma use but it is primarily about using commas to make the meaning of sentences absolutely clear. On some occasions a comma may be needed even though there is no grammatical rule that requires it.

Sometimes a comma can make a huge difference to the meaning of a sentence. Consider these two interpretations...

Lower, please!



Lower please!



- Read the sentences as an editor and decide if you think commas need to be added – not every sentence needs them.
- If you decide to add commas, write the corrected sentence in your book and explain your reason for doing so.-
 1. The rabbit had long sharp pointy teeth.
 2. As the campers sat round the fire eating the bear stayed in the bushes.
 3. Mrs Axcell wanted a biscuit but she couldn't have one.
 4. David who was 10 wore glasses.
 5. Hetty dressed and performed for the packed audience.
 6. There was lots to do at the fair including face painting and a raffle.
 7. While the onions were cooking soup was brought from the shop.
 8. If you have got everything you need then we are ready to go!
 9. Hanging out the washing is one of the most boring things in the world.
 10. He was cold without his jacket even though the sun was shining.

Answers on a separate file.