

# Usage Punctuating Phrases & Clauses

Dependent phrases and clauses often require special punctuation. Listed below are general guidelines for punctuating phrases and clauses.

## INTRODUCTORY ELEMENTS

Use commas after introductory words, phrases, and clauses.

### WORDS

Use commas after introductory words such as *well*, *sure*, *yes*, and *no*.

EXAMPLE: **No**, I don't think Margaret will be able to come.

### PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Use commas after introductory prepositional phrases of more than three words.

EXAMPLE: **During the summer at the lake**, Grandpa taught us to sail.

### PARTICIPIAL PHRASES

Use commas after introductory participial phrases that modify the subject.

EXAMPLE: **Jumping over the last hurdle**, Tom raced to the finish line.

### INFINITIVE PHRASES

Use commas after introductory infinitive phrases.

EXAMPLE: **To arrive on time**, we must leave the house by 6:00 p.m.

### WORDS

Use commas after introductory adverb clauses

EXAMPLE: **While we were waiting for Mom**, we started our homework.

## NONESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Use commas to set off nonessential information.

EXAMPLE: My father, **who was born in southern Utah**, is 83 years old. (The adjective clause is not necessary to identify my father.)

EXAMPLE: Officer Jones, **chasing after the thief**, grabbed the gun. (The participial phrase is not necessary to identify Officer Jones.)

EXAMPLE: Lacrosse, **a sport played hundreds of years ago**, is still popular. (Appositive phrases, which explain or rename the nouns preceding them, are set off with commas.)

## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Do not use commas with essential information.

EXAMPLE: My sister **who lives in Massachusetts** is coming to visit. (Because the writer may have more than one sister, the clause is necessary to distinguish which sister the writer is referring to.)

EXAMPLE: One of the policemen **chasing after the thief** grabbed the gun. (The participial phrase is necessary to identify which policemen the writer is discussing.)

EXAMPLE: The committee reached a decision **that was not popular**. (Adjective clauses that begin with *that* are always essential.)