

Ranly's rules: punctuating for consistency

You always place a comma:

1. After words in a series, but not before “and” or “or” unless the meaning is unclear. *The bat, ball and glove were his.*
2. After an introductory dependent clause in a complex sentence. *Until he came, the party was quiet.*
3. After an introductory independent clause in a compound sentence, before the coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet). *The gang soon left, but Jeff stayed.*
4. Around nonessential, nonrestrictive words, phrases and clauses. (“Which” always introduces a nonrestrictive clause; “that” always introduces a restrictive clause.) *The third house that has green shutters is his.*
5. After introductory participial phrases. *Waiting in the bar, Tom grew restless.*
6. After two or more introductory prepositional phrases. *In May of last year, profits were up.*
7. After an introductory interjection (“Oh, so that’s it.”), an independent element (“Yes, I’m certain.”), a direct address (“Harry, come here!”).
8. Between coordinate adjectives. (Adjectives are coordinate if they can be reversed and if you can insert “and” between them.) *The gaunt, lonely creature was also afraid.*

You may place a comma:

1. After introductory adverbs. *Suddenly, it’s summer.*
2. After an introductory prepositional phrase. *In his later years, he grew even more conservative.*
3. After short sentences in a series (three or more) — rather than semicolons or periods. *It was cold yesterday, it was cold today, and it will be cold tomorrow.* (Note: When using commas to connect short sentences, a comma precedes the final conjunction.)

You always use semicolons:

1. After elements in a series when the elements have commas. *The list included the following: Bill Corrigan, 31, of 445 N. Main St.; Sheila Smith, 28, of 333 Elm St.; and Shawn Taylor, 36, of 71 S. Edgewood Ave.* (Note: in a series such as this, a semicolon precedes the final conjunction.)
2. Between independent clauses to show that they are closely related when no coordinating conjunction is present. *She had an inquiring mind; she read a great deal.*

You always use colons:

1. To introduce more than one item.
2. After an attribution that introduces a direct quotation of more than one sentence. *As Anatole France said: “An education isn’t how much you have committed to memory, or even how much you know. It’s being able to differentiate between what you do know and what you don’t.”*

Note: Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks.

Some adjectives are never coordinate, such as those referring to:

1. Color. *The sleek red convertible was too dangerous.*
2. Age. *The tired young man performed badly.*
3. Material. *The expensive silk scarf did not sell.*
4. Shape. *The tall round building was a bank.*
5. Nationality. *The prominent French director died yesterday.*

Use dashes to show dramatic contrast or emphasis.

The killer whale raced across the pool toward his trainer – then kissed her on the cheek.

Use hyphens:

1. Between compound adjectives. Adjectives are compound when both or several adjectives can’t stand independently with the noun. **light-green house; 7-year-old girl**
2. Between compound nouns when the meaning is unclear. **Animal-lovers**
3. Between adverbs and adjectives. Unless the adverb ends in “ly.” **well-constructed; badly burned**