

These are not the only uses of commas, but are the main ones needed in academic writing. The best way to familiarise yourself with their use is to practise. Try some of the exercises on the websites below to give you that practice:

[www.open.ac.uk/learners-guide/learning-skills/english/sect5/act16a.htm](http://www.open.ac.uk/learners-guide/learning-skills/english/sect5/act16a.htm)

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_comma.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_comma.html)

<http://englishplus.com/grammar/00000067.htm>

Learning Support  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor, All Saints  
Building  
Oxford Road  
Manchester  
M15 6BH

Tel: 0161 247 3491  
Minicom: 0161 247 3374  
Fax: 0161 247 6852  
E-mail: [l.support@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:l.support@mmu.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.mmu.ac.uk/lisu](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/lisu)

**The Learning Support Guide to:**

# **Punctuation:**

# **Commas**

Students often place commas in the wrong place, omit them completely or sprinkle them through their writing at random.

However, there are rules about where commas should appear and, if used correctly, they can enhance the impact and complexity of arguments in your writing.

This simple guide covers the most common, but not the only, uses of commas.

## Commas and Their Usage

### 1. To separate words, clauses and phrases in a list:

e.g. *He was tall, thin, dishevelled and unwashed.*

*The writer's use of argument, style and empirical evidence were faultless.*

*We spent a pleasant afternoon following the route, walking up hills, down dales and through tiny brooks.*

### 2. To separate sentence adverbs or adverbial clauses.

These may appear at the beginning of a sentence:

e.g. *Although it was wet, we had a wonderful time.*

*Jim worked extremely hard. However, his knowledge of the subject was limited.*

These may also occur in the middle of sentences, in which case two commas are needed:

e.g. *Her desire for power, of course, ended in tragedy.*

*Whether the weather improves, however, is another matter.*

### 3. Before or after a phrase or clause in apposition, to give a fuller explanation or description of it:

e.g. *Leon Trotsky, former head of the Red Army, ended his days in exile.*

*The leader of the militant suffragists, Mrs Pankhurst, lived in Manchester with her daughters.*

*The school caretaker, who loved fish, caught and ate £10,000 worth of koi carp.*

### 4. To bracket off afterthoughts or insertions.

e.g. *Sunday, as everyone knows, is a day of rest in the Christian calendar.*

*Please provide details, for our records, of any incidents that have occurred recently.*

*This course, incidentally, only runs on Thursdays.*

**N.B.** If the section inside the commas is removed in 3 and 4 above, the sentences still make sense. This is a useful rule of thumb to apply when in doubt about comma use.