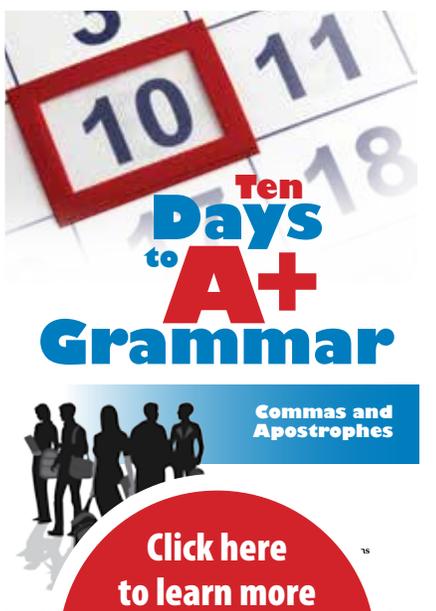




Ten Days to A+
Grammar™

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Ten Days to A+ Grammar

Commas and Apostrophes



by Cheryl Miller Thurston



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Introduction



TEN DAYS TO A+ GRAMMAR: *COMMAS AND APOSTROPHES* is designed to help students master the skill of using commas and apostrophes correctly. These two punctuation marks are probably the most widely misused, and they are misused by writers of all ages.

The daily lessons and exercises in *Ten Days to A+ Grammar: Commas and Apostrophes* are carefully designed to build upon each other. Rather than overwhelming students with a list of rules, the lessons introduce rules and concepts a few at a time, and in an order designed to build understanding. Individual and group activities help reinforce the concepts.

Throughout the guide, various grammatical terms are introduced to students, terms like “appositives” and “parenthetical expressions.” It is important for them to remember that learning these terms shouldn’t become the goal. It is perfectly permissible to know how to punctuate an appositive correctly without necessarily knowing it is called an appositive.

Ten Days to A+ Grammar: Commas and Apostrophes covers all of the most common rules for using commas and apostrophes, and it introduces some of the more uncommon ones. It does not, however, try to cover every obscure possibility that might come up in writing. Supplying rules for every eventuality is likely to only confuse students and is beyond the scope of this ten-day Unit.

The quizzes are designed to be used within each lesson, but can easily be converted into a homework assignment if time proves too short to include it in the day’s work. Day #8, for example, has more exercises than usual because, while there are many distinct rules for apostrophes and a great deal of confusion surrounding them, the best way to learn apostrophes is to actually use them.

Some daily units include more exercises that most classes will be able to cover. The exercises can, therefore, be assigned as homework, extra credit, assignments for specific students who need extra help, etc.

Quizzes, reviews, exercises, and answer keys are all on separate pages, which allows you to copy and distribute the work. If you find yourself with some time remaining at the end of either portion of the guide, use one of the extra tests we have supplied.

Finally, *Ten Days to A+ Grammar: Commas and Apostrophes* keeps writing in mind. It isn’t enough for students to be able to plunk commas and apostrophes into ready-made sentences. They need to be able to transfer rules they learn to their own writing. The exercises in *Ten Days to A+ Grammar: Commas and Apostrophes* involve students in writing and manipulating sentences, helping them to build their skills.

The packet contents, at a glance:

1. Pretest and “Why Do We Have to Learn This Stuff?”
2. Helping students see how various elements can be added before a main clause and should be followed by a comma.
3. Helping students see how certain material can interrupt a main clause and should be set off with commas.
4. Helping students learn how to use commas in a series, in compound sentences, and with two or more adjectives that precede a noun.
5. Helping students learn how to use commas to separate the parts of a date, to separate the parts of an address, to separate a quotation from the rest of a sentence, and to show a contrasting element in a sentence.
6. Reviewing comma rules with a writing exercise that has students use all ten rules in a news story.
7. Helping students understand how to use apostrophes with contractions and with singular possessives and plural possessives that already end in “s.”
8. Helping students learn how to use apostrophes with plural possessives that do not end in “s.”
9. Helping students learn how to use apostrophes for compound possessives and plural letters of the alphabet and reviewing all comma and apostrophe rules.
10. Final test.

DAY #1: Teacher Instructions

Objectives:

- To assess student ability to recognize whether commas and apostrophes are used correctly.
- To give students a quick overview of what they will be studying for the next ten days.
- To help students understand the importance of learning to punctuate correctly.

Activities:

1. **Pretest.** Give the pretest on Commas and Apostrophes.
2. **Overview.** After students finish the pretest, present a brief overview of what will happen during the next ten days: Students will be learning how to use commas and apostrophes correctly. They will study the punctuation rules involved, learn to correct errors they see, and write sentences of their own that are correctly punctuated. On the tenth day, they will take a follow-up test to see how much they have improved.
3. **Lesson.** Present “Why Do We Have to Learn This Stuff?” You might project the page for the class to see (overhead projector, interactive whiteboard, etc.), or photocopy the material and have students read along as you go over it.

Have students actually try to decipher the paragraph that does not adhere to any conventional capitalization, punctuation, or spelling rules. Because it's not an easy task, the exercise makes an important point about how writing rules and standards are meant to make communication easier. This is a very interesting, but difficult exercise. Once the basic concept—an advertisement for ZZLoops—is understood, deciphering the paragraph can be a fun game when done aloud as a class.

DAY # 1: Lesson

Why Do We Have To Learn This Stuff?

Many students wonder why they have to learn about correct capitalization, spelling, and punctuation—especially in this era of text messaging. After all, many people ignore all three aspects of grammar and manage to communicate with their friends.

It's true. Friends who know each other well can manage to decipher even very strange messages. Even people who aren't friends can usually figure out a text message that is short, but full of errors.

On the other hand, imagine a world where all capitalization, spelling, and punctuation rules were not important, and “anything goes” applied to all forms of communication.

DAY #2: Teacher Instructions

Objectives:

- To help students learn to see a sentence as a main clause that may have various kinds of material added before it.
- To help students come up with a rule, in their own words, for using a comma with introductory material such as phrases, clauses, parenthetical expressions, and names used in direct address.
- To have students practice writing sentences with introductory material and punctuating them correctly.

Activities:

1. **Lesson.** Present the lesson “Commas Make a Difference.” You might present the material in the lesson in your own words, project the page for the class to see (overhead projector, interactive whiteboard, etc.), or photocopy the material and have students read along as you go over it.
2. **Practice.** Work with the class as a whole to do “Exercise A.” Discuss any problems, and then have students go on to “Exercise B.”

Have students share some of the “Exercise B” sentences they have written, reading them aloud and pronouncing the commas, as in, “Because he suddenly realized he was failing COMMA Bradley asked if he could do some extra credit.”

DAY #2: Lesson

Commas Make a Difference

Commas do make a difference. They help clarify meaning. Take a look at this sentence:

Let's barbeque grandpa.

That's quite a cruel suggestion! Look at the difference when a comma is added:

Let's barbeque, Grandpa.

Now Grandpa is the one being spoken to, not a potential food for dinner.

Here's another example:

Henry absolutely loves shrimp ice cream and pizza.

Shrimp ice cream? Unlikely. Look at the difference that adding necessary commas makes:

Henry absolutely loves shrimp, ice cream, and pizza.

Commas are small punctuation marks, but they can play a big role in the meaning of a sentence.

Comma myth. Writers often believe that you should put a comma in a sentence whenever there is a pause. That isn't really true. In fact, the "pause" guideline can cause you to add commas where they don't belong at all, such as between two complete sentences. Commas should be added for specific reasons, according to specific rules. It's much smarter to learn exactly when to use them, rather than to rely on the "pause" method.

A way to look at sentences. Before we look at specific comma rules, let's look at some sentence basics. Looking at sentences this way will really help you use commas correctly. Imagine that you have a very simple sentence, which is also called an independent clause, because it has a subject, verb, and expresses a complete thought:

Loretta decided to serve cookies made with oatmeal and seaweed.

You could add something to the beginning of that basic sentence in many ways. Some examples:

Because she didn't really know kindergartners very well, *Loretta decided to serve cookies made with oatmeal and seaweed.*

Unfortunately, *Loretta decided to serve cookies made with oatmeal and seaweed.*

Yes, *Loretta decided to serve cookies made with oatmeal and seaweed.*

Mom, *Loretta decided to serve cookies made with oatmeal and seaweed.*

After thinking about it, *Loretta decided to serve cookies made with oatmeal and seaweed.*

DAY #3: Teacher Instructions

Objectives:

- To help students come up with a rule, in their own words, for using a comma with interrupting material.
- To help students generalize and apply the same rule to ending material.
- To help students distinguish between essential and nonessential clauses.
- To give students practice punctuating sentences of their own with ending and interrupting material.

Activities:

1. **Lesson.** Present the lesson “Commas in the Middle and at the End.” You might present the material in the lesson in your own words, project the page for the class to see (overhead projector, interactive whiteboard, etc.), or photocopy the material and have students read along as you go over it.

Because students should now be familiar with the idea of adding introductory material to a main clause, they should be able to fairly easily apply the same principle to appropriate interrupting and ending material.

Do spend some time on the difference between essential and nonessential phrases and clauses, but don't make it the focus of the lesson. To belabor the issue can easily confuse students and undo what they have already learned. Touch on it, and give them the important hint about “that” clauses. Then move on.

Go over “Exercise A” as a group.

2. **Writing.** Have students exercise their creativity and their use of commas with the activity “Build a Sentence.” The sentences they create will be pretty odd, but that's all right. The object is to reinforce the idea that material can be added to the beginning, middle, or end of a main clause.

DAY #3: Lesson Part I

Commas in the Middle and at the End

You have learned about the need for commas after certain introductory material. Sometimes, though, we need to add material in the middle of a sentence, interrupting its normal flow. Here's a basic sentence:

Mia worked in the men's store at the mall.

Here it is with interrupting material, in this case an appositive:

Mia, a girl who loved crowds, worked in the men's store at the mall.

Here's another basic sentence:

Mia showed Zeke the jacket and hoped he would buy it.

Here it is with interrupting material, a clause:

Mia showed Zeke the jacket, which was made of black leather and had pockets on the front, and hoped he would buy it.

Now, imagine that someone is talking to Mia about Zeke:

When you showed Zeke the jacket, Mia, he knew he had to buy it.

Now look at variations on the same situations, with different kinds of interrupting material, in this case a parenthetical expression:

Zeke wanted the jacket, however, someone else bought the last one.

Now, look at it with a clause interrupting it:

Zeke, who didn't usually care much about clothes, saw the jacket and knew he had to buy it.

Finally, here is a sentence with various interrupters.

Elizabeth, I saw Mia, the girl who works at the mall, try to sell Zeke that leather jacket, the black one with pockets on the front, but someone else bought the last one in the store.

Look over all these examples and come up with a rule, in your own words, that covers the situations above. (NOTE: Students should end up with a sentence similar to, "Put a comma on both sides of a word or group of words that interrupts the flow of a sentence.")

DAY #4: Teacher Instructions

Objectives:

- To review what has been covered previously.
- To help students learn three comma rules.
- To have students practice writing and punctuating compound sentences correctly.

Activities:

1. **Lesson.** Quickly review Rules 1 – 3: Introductory Comments, Materials that Interrupt the Sentence Flow, and Interrupters at the End of the Sentence. You can display the eight sentences as review or go over some of your own.

Present the lesson “Three New Comma Rules.” You might present the material in the lesson in your own words, project the page for the class to see (overhead projector, interactive whiteboard, etc.), or photocopy the material and have students read along as you go over it.

Have students quickly do “Exercise #1.” Go over it as a group.

2. **Writing.** Students learn more when they write, rather than just correct the errors of others. To help them clearly understand compound sentences, have them try “Make it Compound.”

DAY #4: Lesson

Three New Comma Rules

Today, we are going to review the three comma rules you have already learned and then work in small groups to play a writing game.

Helen, could you please shut the curtains.
There is no way, however, that you will ever convince me.
I personally knew Mr. Karol, the previous owner of this car.
Ed's twin, who never wins anything, just won a free trip to Paris.
Fellow members of the Fish Club of Utah, let me show you my tank.
Josh's dog, which is a mixed breed, is very strong.
Tremendous effort, exactly what the team did not have, was needed now.
Does anyone know Doug Hamilton, the author of this long book?

What happens when you have a list of things and don't put commas between them? You end up with sentences like the one we talked about a couple of days ago:

Henry likes shrimp ice cream and pizza.

It's much more appetizing this way, however:

Henry likes shrimp, ice cream, and pizza.

That brings us to the first comma rule for the day:

Rule #4: Separate items in a list or series with commas.

Examples:

Coach Cavendish told the soccer players to bring water, granola bars, and sunscreen to the meet.

For breakfast, Dylan had leftover spaghetti, Pop-Tarts, a large cup of coffee, a slice of pound cake, and an orange.

Abigail got out her notebook, polished her glasses, sharpened her pencil, opened her textbook, and then decided to watch television.

Notice that the examples above include a comma before the word "and." This comma is needed to prevent confusion. You should remember to put a comma before the final "and" in a series.

Look at this sentence:

Squirrels, rabbits, raccoons and large animals were easy to catch during the winter.

Punctuated like this, the sentence means that *raccoons and large animals* is the last item in the series and that raccoons are *large animals*. This is not true. Raccoons are not large.