

The comma

The comma was invented to help readers. Without it, sentence parts can collide into one another unexpectedly, causing misreadings.

CONFUSING If you cook Elmer will do the dishes.

CONFUSING While we were eating a rattlesnake approached our campsite.

Add commas in the logical places (after *cook* and *eating*), and suddenly all is clear. No longer is Elmer being cooked, the rattlesnake being eaten.

Various rules have evolved to prevent such misreadings and to speed readers along through complex grammatical structures. Those rules are detailed in this section.

32a Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining independent clauses.

When a coordinating conjunction connects two or more independent clauses—word groups that could stand alone as separate sentences—a comma must precede it. There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English: *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*.

A comma tells readers that one independent clause has come to a close and that another is about to begin.

- ▶ Nearly everyone has heard of love at first sight, but I fell in love at first dance.

EXCEPTION: If the two independent clauses are short and there is no danger of misreading, the comma may be omitted.

The plane took off and we were on our way.

GRAMMAR CHECKERS have mixed success in flagging missing or misused commas. They can tell you that a comma is usually used before *which* but not before *that* (see 32e), and they can flag some missing commas after an introductory word or word group or between items in a series. In general, however, the programs are unreliable. For example, in an essay with ten missing commas and five misused ones, a grammar checker spotted only one missing comma (after the word *therefore*).

CAUTION: As a rule, do *not* use a comma to separate coordinate word groups that are not independent clauses. (See 33a.)

- ▶ A good money manager controls expenses/ and invests surplus dollars to meet future needs.

The word group following *and* is not an independent clause; it is the second half of a compound predicate.

32b Use a comma after an introductory clause or phrase.

The most common introductory word groups are clauses and phrases functioning as adverbs. Such word groups usually tell when, where, how, why, or under what conditions the main action of the sentence occurred. (See 63a–63c.)

A comma tells readers that the introductory clause or phrase has come to a close and that the main part of the sentence is about to begin.

- ▶ When Irwin was ready to eat, his cat jumped onto the table. Without the comma, reader's may imagine Irwin eating his cat. The comma signals that *his cat* is the subject of a new clause, not part of the introductory one.

- ▶ Near a small stream at the bottom of the canyon, the park rangers discovered an abandoned mine.

The comma tells readers that the introductory prepositional phrase has come to a close.



EXCEPTION: The comma may be omitted after a short adverb clause or phrase if there is no danger of misreading.

In no time we were at 2,800 feet.

Sentences also frequently begin with participial phrases describing the noun or pronoun immediately following them (see 63c). The comma tells readers that they are about to learn the identity of the person or thing described; therefore, the comma is usually required even when the phrase is short.

► Thinking his motorcade drive through Dallas was routine, President Kennedy smiled and waved at the crowds.

► Buried under layers of younger rocks, the earth's oldest rocks contain no fossils.

NOTE: Other introductory word groups include transitional expressions and absolute phrases (see 32f).

EXERCISE 32-1

Add or delete commas where necessary in the following sentences. If a sentence is correct, write "correct" after it. Answers to lettered sentences appear in the back of the book. Example:

Because it rained all Labor Day, our picnic was rather soggy.

- Alisa brought the injured bird home, and fashioned a splint out of Popsicle sticks for its wing.
 - Considered the first Western philosopher Thales believed that water was the elemental principle underlying all things.
 - If you complete the enclosed card, and return it within two weeks, you will receive a free breakfast during your stay.
 - After retiring from the New York City Ballet in 1965, legendary dancer Maria Tallchief went on to found the Chicago City Ballet.
 - Uncle Swen's dulcimers disappeared as soon as he put them up for sale but he always kept one for himself.
- When the runaway race car crashed the gas tank exploded.

- He pushed the car beyond the tollgate, and poured a bucket of water on the smoking hood.
- Lighting the area like a second moon the helicopter circled the scene.
- As the concert began, we heard a tremendous explosion.
- Many musicians of Bach's time played several instruments but few mastered them as early or played with as much expression as Bach.

32c

Use a comma between all items in a series.

When three or more items are presented in a series, those items should be separated from one another with commas. Items in a series may be single words, phrases, or clauses.

► Bubbles of air, leaves, ferns, bits of wood, and insects are often found trapped in amber.

ON THE WEB

The rules on using commas with items in a series have sparked debates. If you're interested in learning why, go to dianahacker.com/rules and click on

- Language Debates
- Commas with items in a series

Although some writers view the comma between the last two items as optional, most experts advise using the comma because its omission can result in ambiguity.

► Uncle David willed me all of his property, houses, and warehouses.

Did Uncle David will his property and houses and warehouses—or simply his property, consisting of houses and warehouses? If the former meaning is intended, a comma is necessary to prevent ambiguity.

32d Use a comma between coordinate adjectives not joined with *and*. Do not use a comma between cumulative adjectives.

When two or more adjectives each modify a noun separately, they are coordinate.

Roberto is a warm, gentle, affectionate father.

Adjectives are coordinate if they can be joined with *and* (warm and gentle and affectionate).

Adjectives that do not modify the noun separately are cumulative.

Three large gray shapes moved slowly toward us.

We cannot insert the word *and* between cumulative adjectives (three and large and gray shapes).

COORDINATE ADJECTIVES

- Patients with severe, irreversible brain damage should not be put on life support systems.

CUMULATIVE ADJECTIVES

- Ira ordered a rich/ chocolate/ layer cake.

EXERCISE 32-2

Add or delete commas where necessary in the following sentences. If a sentence is correct, write "correct" after it. Answers to lettered sentences appear in the back of the book. Example:

We gathered our essentials, took off for the great outdoors, and ignored the fact that it was Friday the 13th.

- a. The cold impersonal atmosphere of the university was unbearable.
- b. An ambulance threaded its way through police cars, fire trucks and irate citizens.
- c. The 1812 Overture is a stirring, magnificent piece of music.
- d. After two broken arms, three cracked ribs and one concussion, Ken quit the varsity football team.

- e. My cat's pupils had constricted to small black shining dots.
1. We prefer our staff to be orderly, prompt and efficient.
2. For breakfast the children ordered cornflakes, English muffins with peanut butter and cherry Cokes.
3. It was a small, unimportant part, but I was happy to have it.
4. Cyril was clad in a luminous orange rain suit and a brilliant white helmet.
5. Anne Frank and thousands like her were forced to hide in attics, cellars and secret rooms in an effort to save their lives.

32e Use commas to set off nonrestrictive elements. Do not use commas to set off restrictive elements.

Word groups describing nouns or pronouns (adjective clauses, adjective phrases, and appositives) are restrictive or nonrestrictive. A *restrictive* element defines or limits the meaning of the word it modifies and is therefore essential to the meaning of the sentence. Because it contains essential information, a restrictive element is not set off with commas.

RESTRICTIVE The children needed clothes *that were washable*.

If you remove a restrictive element from a sentence, the meaning changes significantly, becoming more general than you intended. The writer of the example sentence does not mean that the children needed clothes in general. The intended meaning is more limited: the children needed *washable* clothes.

A *nonrestrictive* element describes a noun or pronoun whose meaning has already been clearly defined or limited. Because it contains nonessential or parenthetical information, a nonrestrictive element is set off with commas.

NONRESTRICTIVE The children needed sturdy shoes, *which were expensive*.

If you remove a nonrestrictive element from a sentence, the meaning does not change dramatically. Some meaning is lost, to be sure, but the defining characteristics of the person or thing described remain the same as before. The children needed *sturdy shoes*, and these happened to be expensive.

NOTE: Often it is difficult to tell whether a word group is restrictive or nonrestrictive without seeing it in context and

considering the writer's meaning. Both of the following sentences are grammatically correct, but their meaning is slightly different.

The dessert made with fresh raspberries was delicious.

The dessert, made with fresh raspberries, was delicious.

In the example without commas, the phrase *made with fresh raspberries* tells readers which of two or more desserts the writer is referring to. In the example with commas, the phrase merely adds information about the particular dessert served with the meal.

Adjective clauses

Adjective clauses are patterned like sentences, containing subjects and verbs, but they function within sentences as modifiers of nouns or pronouns. They always follow the word they modify, usually immediately. Adjective clauses begin with a relative pronoun (*who, whom, whose, which, that*) or with a relative adverb (*where, when*).

Nonrestrictive adjective clauses are set off with commas; restrictive adjective clauses are not.

NONRESTRICTIVE CLAUSE

- ▶ Ed's house, which is located on thirteen acres, was completely furnished with bats in the rafters and mice in the kitchen.

The adjective clause *which is located on thirteen acres* does not restrict the meaning of *Ed's house*, so the information is nonessential.

RESTRICTIVE CLAUSE

- ▶ An office manager for a corporation/that had government contracts/asked her supervisor whether she could reprimand her co-workers for smoking.

Because the adjective clause *that had government contracts* identifies the corporation, the information is essential.

NOTE: Use *that* only with restrictive clauses. Many writers prefer to use *which* only with nonrestrictive clauses, but usage varies.

ON THE WEB

The rules on using *that* versus *which* have sparked debates. If you're interested in learning why, go to dianahacker.com/rules

- ▶ [Language Debates](#)
- ▶ [that versus which](#)

Phrases functioning as adjectives

Prepositional or verbal phrases functioning as adjectives may be restrictive or nonrestrictive. Nonrestrictive phrases are set off with commas; restrictive phrases are not.

NONRESTRICTIVE PHRASE

- ▶ The helicopter, with its 100,000-candlepower spotlight illuminating the area, circled above.

The *with* phrase is nonessential because its purpose is not to specify which of two or more helicopters is being discussed.

RESTRICTIVE PHRASE

- ▶ One corner of the attic was filled with newspapers/ dating from the turn of the century.

Dating from the turn of the century restricts the meaning of *newspapers*, so the comma should be omitted.

Appositives

An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun. Nonrestrictive appositives are set off with commas; restrictive appositives are not.

NONRESTRICTIVE APPOSITIVE

- Daryin's most important book, *On the Origin of Species*, was the result of many years of research.

Most important restricts the meaning to one book, so the appositive *On the Origin of Species* is nonrestrictive.

RESTRICTIVE APPOSITIVE

- The song "Fire It Up" was blasted out of amplifiers ten feet tall.
- Once they've read song, readers still don't know precisely which song the writer means. The appositive following song restricts its meaning.

EXERCISE 32-3

Add or delete commas where necessary in the following sentences. If a sentence is correct, write "correct" after it. Answers to lettered sentences appear in the back of the book. Example:

My youngest sister, who plays left wing on the team, now lives at The Sands, a beach house near Los Angeles.

- Choreographer Alvin Alley's best-known work *Revelations* is more than just a crowd pleaser.
 - Twyla Tharp's contemporary ballet *Push Comes to Shove* was made famous by Russian dancer Baryshnikov. [Tharp has written more than one contemporary ballet.]
 - The woman running for the council seat in the fifth district has a long history of community service.
 - A member of an organization, that provides housing for AIDS patients, was also appointed to the commission.
 - A 1911 fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company which killed 146 sweatshop workers led to reforms in working conditions.
- I had the pleasure of talking to a woman who had just returned from India where she had lived for ten years.
 - Sally's best friend Sid Phillips has been playing the guitar since the age of seven.

- The gentleman waiting for the prescription is Mr. Rhee.
- Where the Wild Things Are, the 1964 Caldecott Medal winner, is my nephew's favorite book.
- The flame crawled up a few blades of grass to reach a low-hanging palmetto branch which quickly ignited.

32f Use commas to set off transitional and parenthetical expressions, absolute phrases, and elements expressing contrast.

Transitional expressions

Transitional expressions serve as bridges between sentences or parts of sentences. They include conjunctive adverbs such as *however, therefore, and moreover* and transitional phrases such as *for example, as a matter of fact, and in other words*. (For more complete lists, see also 34b.)

When a transitional expression appears between independent clauses in a compound sentence, it is preceded by a semicolon and is often followed by a comma. (See also 34b.)

- Minh did not understand our language; moreover, he was unfamiliar with our customs.

When a transitional expression appears at the beginning or in the middle of an independent clause, it is usually set off with commas.

- As a matter of fact, American football was established by fans who wanted to play a more organized game of rugby.
- Natural foods are not always salt free; celery, for example, contains more sodium than most people would imagine.

EXCEPTION: If a transitional expression blends smoothly with the rest of the sentence, calling for little or no pause in reading, it does not need to be set off with a comma. Expressions such as

also, at least, certainly, consequently, indeed, of course, moreover, no doubt, perhaps, then, and therefore do not always call for a pause.

Alice's bicycle is broken; therefore you will need to borrow Sue's.

Parenthetical expressions

Expressions that are distinctly parenthetical should be set off with commas. Providing supplemental information, they interrupt the flow of a sentence or appear at the end as afterthoughts.

- ▶ Evolution, as far as we know, doesn't work this way.
- ▶ The bass weighed about twelve pounds, give or take a few ounces.

Absolute phrases

An absolute phrase, which modifies the whole sentence, usually consists of a noun followed by a participle or participial phrase. (See 63e.) Absolute phrases may appear at the beginning or at the end of a sentence. Wherever they appear, they should be set off with commas.

- ▶ Our grant having been approved, we were at last able to begin the archaeological dig.
- ▶ Elvis Presley made music industry history in the 1950s, his records having sold more than ten million copies.

CAUTION: Do not insert a comma between the noun and participle of an absolute construction.

- ▶ The next day/ being a school day, we turned down the invitation.

Contrasted elements

Sharp contrasts beginning with words such as *not*, *never*, and *unlike* are set off with commas.

- ▶ The Epicurean philosophers sought mental, not bodily, pleasures.
- ▶ Unlike Robert, Celia loved dance contests.

32g Use commas to set off nouns of direct address, the words *yes* and *no*, interrogative tags, and mild interjections.

- ▶ Forgive us, Dr. Spock, for reprimanding Jason.
- ▶ Yes, the loan will probably be approved.
- ▶ The film was faithful to the book, wasn't it?
- ▶ Well, cases like these are difficult to decide.

32h Use commas with expressions such as *he said* to set off direct quotations. (See also 37f.)

- ▶ Naturalist Arthur Cleveland Bent remarked, "In part the peregrine declined unnoticed because it is not adorable."
- ▶ "Convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than lies," wrote philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

32i Use commas with dates, addresses, titles, and numbers.

Dates

In dates, the year is set off from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas.



- On December 12, 1890, orders were sent out for the arrest of Sitting Bull.

EXCEPTIONS: Commas are not needed if the date is inverted or if only the month and year are given.

The recycling plan went into effect on 15 April 2003.
January 2003 was an extremely cold month.

Addresses

The elements of an address or place name are separated by commas. A zip code, however, is not preceded by a comma.

- John Lennon was born in Liverpool, England, in 1940.
► Please send the package to Greg Tarvin at 708 Spring Street, Washington, Illinois 61571.

Titles

If a title follows a name, separate it from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas.

- Sandra Belinsky, M.D., has been appointed to the board of trustees.

Numbers

In numbers more than four digits long, use commas to separate the numbers into groups of three, starting from the right. In numbers four digits long, a comma is optional.

3,500 [or 3500]
100,000
5,000,000

EXCEPTIONS: Do not use commas in street numbers, zip codes, telephone numbers, or years.

32j Use a comma to prevent confusion.

In certain contexts, a comma is necessary to prevent confusion. If the writer has omitted a word or phrase, for example, a comma may be needed to signal the omission.

- To err is human; to forgive, divine.

If two words in a row echo each other, a comma may be needed for ease of reading.

- All of the catastrophes that we had feared might happen, happened.

Sometimes a comma is needed to prevent readers from grouping words in ways that do not match the writer's intention.

- Patients who can, walk up and down the halls several times a day.

EXERCISE 32-4: Major uses of the comma

This exercise covers the major uses of the comma listed in the chart on page 280. Add or delete commas where necessary. If a sentence is correct, write "correct" after it. Answers to lettered sentences appear in the back of the book. Example:

Although we invited him to the party, Gerald decided to spend another late night in the computer room.

- Crickets, which originated in England is also popular in Australia, South Africa and India.
- At the sound of a starting pistol the horses surged forward toward the first obstacle, a sharp incline three feet high.
- After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 the Ku Klux Klan went underground for a few years but the group's racist views did not change.
- Jan's costume was completed with bright red, snakeskin sandals.

Major uses of the comma

BEFORE A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION JOINING INDEPENDENT CLAUSES (32a)

No grand idea was ever born in a conference, but a lot of foolish ideas have died there.
— F. Scott Fitzgerald

AFTER AN INTRODUCTORY CLAUSE OR PHRASE (32b)

If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.
— George Orwell

BETWEEN ALL ITEMS IN A SERIES (32c)

All the things I really like to do are either immoral, illegal, or fattening.
— Alexander Woolcott

BETWEEN COORDINATE ADJECTIVES (32d)

There is a mighty big difference between good, sound reasons and reasons that sound good.
— Burton Hillis

TO SET OFF NONRESTRICTIVE ELEMENTS (32e)

Silence, which will save me from shame, will also deprive me of fame.
— Igor Stravinsky

- e. Computers must be manufactured in clean climate-controlled rooms.
1. Research on Andean condors has shown that high levels of the chemical pesticide chlorinated hydrocarbon can cause the thinning of eggshells.
2. Founded in 1868 Hampton University was one of the first colleges for African Americans.
3. Aunt Emilia was an impossible demanding guest.
4. The French Mirage, the fastest airplane in the Colombian air force, was an astonishing machine to fly.
5. In the showroom sat a brand-new, red convertible Porsche, a car no driver can resist.

EXERCISE 32-5: All uses of the comma

Add or delete commas where necessary in the following sentences. If a sentence is correct, write "correct" after it. Answers to lettered sentences appear in the back of the book. Example:

"Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus," wrote the editor.

- a. On January 15, 1996 our office moved to 29 Commonwealth Avenue, Mechanicsville Virginia 19607.
- b. The coach having bawled us out thoroughly, we left the locker room with his harsh words ringing in our ears.
- c. Ms. Carlson you are a valued customer whose satisfaction is very important to us.
- d. Mr. Mundy was born on July 22, 1939 in Arkansas, where his family had lived for four generations.
- e. Swords flashing, our heroes dashed into action.
1. President Lincoln's original intention was to save the Union, not to destroy slavery.
2. For centuries people believed that Greek culture had developed in isolation from the world. Today however scholars are acknowledging the contributions made by Egypt and the Middle East.
3. Eating raw limpets, I found out, is like trying to eat art gum erasers.
4. Fortunately science is creating many alternatives to research performed on animals.
5. While the machine was printing the oversized paper jammed.

ON THE WEB

For electronic exercises on using commas, go to dianahacker.com/rules

and click on ► **Electronic Grammar Exercises**
► **Punctuation**
► **E-ex 32-1 through 32-3**

33

Unnecessary commas

Many common misuses of the comma result from an incomplete understanding of the major comma rules presented in 32. In particular, writers frequently form misconceptions about rules 32a-32e, either extending the rules inappropriately or



misinterpreting them. Such misconceptions can lead to the errors described in 33a–33e; rules 33f–33h list other common misuses of the comma.

33a Do not use a comma between compound elements that are not independent clauses.

Though a comma should be used before a coordinating conjunction joining independent clauses (see 32a), this rule should not be extended to other compound word groups.

- ▶ Marie Curie discovered radium/ and later applied her work on radioactivity to medicine.
And links two verbs in a compound predicate: *discovered* and *applied*.

- ▶ Jake still doesn't realize that his illness is serious/ and that he will have to alter his diet to improve his chances of survival.
And links two subordinate clauses, each beginning with *that*.

33b Do not use a comma after a phrase that begins an inverted sentence.

Though a comma belongs after most introductory phrases (see 32b), it does not belong after phrases that begin an inverted sentence. In an inverted sentence, the subject follows the verb, and a phrase that ordinarily would follow the verb is moved to the beginning (see 62c).

- ▶ At the bottom of the sound/ lies a ship laden with treasure.

33c Do not use a comma before the first or after the last item in a series.

Though commas are required between items in a series (32c), do not place them either before or after the whole series

- ▶ Other causes of asthmatic attacks are/ stress, change in temperature, humidity, and cold air.
- ▶ Ironically, this job that appears so glamorous, carefree, and easy/ carries a high degree of responsibility.

33d Do not use a comma between cumulative adjectives, between an adjective and a noun, or between an adverb and an adjective.

Commas are required between coordinate adjectives (those that can be joined with *and*), but they do not belong between cumulative adjectives (those that cannot be joined with *and*). (For a full discussion, see 32d.)

- ▶ In the corner of the closet we found an old/ maroon hatbox from Sears.

A comma should never be used between an adjective and the noun that follows it.

- ▶ It was a senseless, dangerous/ mission.

Nor should a comma be used between an adverb and an adjective that follows it.

- ▶ The Hurst Home is unsuitable as a mental facility for severely/ disturbed youths.

33e Do not use commas to set off restrictive or mildly parenthetical elements.

Restrictive elements are modifiers or appositives that restrict the meaning of the nouns they follow. Because they are essential to the meaning of the sentence, they are not set off with

commas. (For a full discussion of both restrictive and nonrestrictive elements, see 32e.)

- *Drivers/ who think they own the road/ make cycling a dangerous sport.*

The modifier *who think they own the road* restricts the meaning of *Drivers* and is therefore essential to the meaning of the sentence. Putting commas around the *who* clause falsely suggests that all drivers think they own the road.

- Margaret Mead's book/ *Coming of Age in Samoa*/ stirred up considerable controversy when it was published.

Since Mead wrote more than one book, the appositive contains information essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Although commas should be used with distinctly parenthetical expressions (see 32f), do not use them to set off elements that are only mildly parenthetical.

- Charisse believes that the Internet is/ essentially/ a bastion of advertising.

33f Do not use a comma to set off a concluding adverb clause that is essential to the meaning of the sentence.

When adverb clauses introduce a sentence, they are nearly always followed by a comma (see 32b). When they conclude a sentence, however, they are not set off by commas if their content is essential to the meaning of the earlier part of the sentence. Adverb clauses beginning with *after*, *as soon as*, *because*, *before*, *if*, *since*, *unless*, *until*, and *when* are usually essential.

- Don't visit Paris at the height of the tourist season/ unless you have booked hotel reservations.

Without the *unless* clause, the meaning of the sentence might at first seem broader than the writer intended.

When a concluding adverb clause is nonessential, it should be preceded by a comma. Clauses beginning with *although*, *even though*, *though*, and *whereas* are usually nonessential.

- The lecture seemed to last only a short time, although the clock said it had gone on for more than an hour.

33g Do not use a comma to separate a verb from its subject or object.

A sentence should flow from subject to verb to object without unnecessary pauses. Commas may appear between these major sentence elements only when a specific rule calls for them.

- Zoos large enough to give the animals freedom to roam/ are becoming more popular.

- Francesca explained to him/ that she was busy and would see him later.

In the first sentence, the comma should not separate the subject, Zoos, from the verb, *are becoming*. In the second sentence, the comma should not separate the verb, *explained*, from its object, the subordinate clause *that she was busy and would see him later*.

33h Avoid other common misuses of the comma.

Do not use a comma in the following situations.

AFTER A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION (AND, BUT, OR, NOR, FOR, SO, YET)

- Occasionally soap operas are performed live, but/ more often they are taped.

**AFTER SUCH AS OR LIKE**

- Many shade-loving plants, such as/ begonias, impatiens, and coleus, can add color to a shady garden.

BEFORE THAN

- Touring Crete was more thrilling for us/ than visiting the Greek islands frequented by rich Europeans.

AFTER ALTHOUGH

- Although/ the air was balmy, the water was too cold for swimming.

BEFORE A PARENTHESIS

- At MCI Sylvia began at the bottom/ (with only three and a half walls and a swivel chair), but within five years she had been promoted to supervisor.

TO SET OFF AN INDIRECT (REPORTED) QUOTATION

- Samuel Goldwyn once said/ that a verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's written on.

WITH A QUESTION MARK OR AN EXCLAMATION POINT

- "Why don't you try it?/" she coaxed. "You can't do any worse than the rest of us."

EXERCISE 33-1

Delete commas where necessary in the following sentences. If a sentence is correct, write "correct" after it. Answers to lettered sentences appear in the back of the book. Example:

Loretta Lynn has paved the way for artists such as/ Shania Twain and the Dixie Chicks.

- a. As a child growing up in Jamaica, I often daydreamed about life in the United States.
- b. He wore a thick, black, wool coat over army fatigues.
- c. Often public figures, (Greta Garbo was a good example) go to great lengths to guard their private lives.
- d. She loved early spring flowers such as, crocuses, daffodils, forsythia, and irises.
- e. On Pam's wrist, was a tattoo of a dragon chasing a tiger.
1. Mesquite, the hardest of the softwoods, grows primarily in the Southwest.
2. Male supremacy was assumed by my father, and accepted by my mother.
3. The lieutenant reported to his captain, that all of his men were present and accounted for.
4. The streets that three hours later would be bumper to bumper with commuters, were quiet and empty except for a few prowling cats.
5. Most of the citizens in the United States, expect their elected officials to be truthful.

ON THE WEB

For an electronic exercise on the use and misuse of commas, go to dianahacker.com/rules and click on ►

- Electronic Grammar Exercises
► Punctuation
► E-ex 33-1

34**The semicolon**

The semicolon is used to connect major sentence elements of equal grammatical rank.