



Beth K. Vogt

author - speaker - editor



Comma Sense

By Beth K. Vogt

Of all the punctuation marks available to writers, the comma trips us up the most. So The Evil Editor, aka TEE, is here to talk a little “Comma Sense” into you.

Remember: The [AP Stylebook](#)= magazines and newspapers & [The Chicago Manual of Style \(CMOS\)](#) = books.

The *AP Stylebook*'s overarching rule is *clarity*. Does the sentence read better with a comma, i.e. a slight pause? Specific guidelines include:

- ❖ No comma before the word “too.” Ex: *I want to go see The Lion King on Broadway too.*
- ❖ No comma before the final item in a simple series (a list of three items.) Ex: *I love daffodils, gerbera daisies and tulips.*
- ❖ Use a comma when a conjunction (*and, but* or *for*) links two independent clauses, i.e. clauses that could stand alone as separate sentences. The comma goes before the conjunction. Ex: *I like to read romances, but my husband likes to read techno-thrillers.*
- ❖ Use a comma before the word “then” when it functions as a conjunction (replacing “and”). Ex: *The boys dressed in black and grabbed their flashlights, then they went outside to play Capture the Flag.*
- ❖ No comma after short introductory phrase (two words.) Use a comma if the introductory phrase stretches to several or more words.) Ex: *Last year we went to Mexico.*

So what's the *CMOS*'s approach to commas?

- ❖ Use commas in a series of three or more. If a conjunction (*and* or *but*) join the last two items, the comma goes before the conjunction. Ex: *My favorite teas are Lady Jane Grey, Constant Comment, and Bigelow Mint.*
- ❖ Use a comma with clauses using “which.” Ex: *I love my Kindle, which my husband begged me to buy.*
- ❖ No comma when using the word “that.” Ex: *The clock that is hanging on the wall in my family room is an antique.*
- ❖ When independent clauses are joined by *and, but, or, so, yet* or other conjunctions, use a comma before the conjunction. Ex: *I bought the groceries, but Nate prepared the meal.*

Afraid you'll never remember all this? Copy and paste this column into a Word doc and post it by your computer for easy reference. Better yet, invest in the online versions of *APStyle* and *CMOS*.