

POLISH UP YOUR PUNCTUATION

Help sheet two: commas.

RULES

1. Commas are used to separate lists of words.

Without commas, lists would be hard to understand. For example, which do you think is easier to read?

- For breakfast I had five rashers of bacon four sausages three slices of black pudding two fried eggs grilled tomatoes mushrooms baked beans and six slices of toast.
- For breakfast I had five rashers of bacon, four sausages, three slices of black pudding, two fried eggs, grilled tomatoes, mushrooms, baked beans and six slices of toast.

2. You can also use commas to separate some of the phrases you use to build sentences. For example:

Angelica, who was laughing and crying with joy, told us she had passed all her GCSEs. You could take out the phrase “,who was laughing and crying with joy,” and the sentence would still make sense on its own.

3. A helpful guideline is to put a comma in a sentence wherever you would pause or take a breath if you were reading it out loud. For example: scampering up the tree, the squirrel was a blur of red.

A. Look around the room you are in and make a list of all the objects in it. Do not forget to place commas between them.

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B. Write out these sentences, placing commas around the phrases (the first one is done for you):

1. Henry the Eighth, who had six wives, was a tyrant.
2. Fred's dragon who had been snuffling through the hotel rubbish bins had got his head stuck.
3. Adrian unused to the manners of aliens gawped as it slurped down ten tins of mushy peas.
4. Chris Moyles cueing up the next record talked faster than a bookie at a race meeting.
5. The headmaster pulling himself up to his full height let out a roar of rage.
6. Mum looking very embarrassed dragged my screaming little brother out of the news agent's.
7. The hawk hovering above the meadow spotted a mouse.
8. The model who was beautiful but growing old regretted leaving school without any qualifications.

C. Write out this passage, putting in the missing commas:

Daniel stormed up the stairs. Dad was right he ought to tidy up his bedroom before his mum came home from hospital but he had better things to do like going to cricket practise. He lay on the bed taking comfort from the familiar things around him. On the walls were all his Arsenal posters neatly arranged so that they lined up between the window and the wardrobe. Looking at his wardrobe Daniel could see the sleeve of a shirt hanging out of the door. Maybe he ought to put some of his school shirts on hangers. They were flung across the back of an old leather chair in the corner. Getting at the chair was difficult though because of other clothes on the floor his train set a jigsaw and his cricket bat. He'd tidy up his chest of drawers first that was easier. Daniel opened the top drawer and swept the clutter off the top into it. They're all done and dusted. Well not dusted that would be taking tidying up too far!