

ACT MINI-LESSON: THE COMMA

*ADAPTED FROM MANHATTAN PREP 5 LB ACT TEST PREP BOOK, UNBC WRITING
LAB, AND ASHFORD WRITING CENTER*

COMMAS AND COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

- Put a comma before FANBOYS coordinating conjunctions (FOR, AND, NOR, BUT, OR, YET, SO) when they connect two independent clauses.
- EX: He cooked dinner, but I washed the dishes.
- EX: You can cook the dinner or wash the dishes.

COMMMAS IN A SERIES

- A series contains three or more items separated by commas. The items can either be nouns (such as “dog”) or verb phrases (such as “get in the car”).
- EX: The hungry athlete devoured a piece of chicken, a pound of pasta, and a slice of chocolate cake.

COMMMAS SEPARATE ADJECTIVES

- A comma separates adjectives only if they can be in reverse order and still make sense.
- Rebecca's new dog has long, silky hair.
- Marianne's light blue dress fluttered in the breeze.

COMMAS SET OFF CLAUSES AND PHRASES FROM A COMPLETE SENTENCE

- Commas set off clauses and phrases from a complete sentence.
- After preparing an elaborate meal for herself, Anne was too tired to eat.
- Anne was too tired to eat after preparing an elaborate meal for herself.

COMMAS SET OFF NON-ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Non-essential elements embellish nouns without specifying them.
- Everyone voted Carrie, who is the most popular girl in our class, prom queen.
- The decrepit street sign, which had stood in our town since 1799, finally fell down.

COMMAS: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Essential elements are not set off by commas because they are necessary to the meaning of the sentence.
- The girl who is sick missed three days of school.
- The dog that ate the rotten steak fell down and died.

COMMAS: APPOSITIVES

- An appositive is a phrase that renames or restates the modified noun, usually enhancing it with additional information.
- Everyone voted Carrie, the most popular girl in school, prom queen.
- The dog, a Yorkshire Terrier, barked at all the neighbors.

PRACTICE



QUESTION 1

1. Although the term “hoppin’ john” may not seem appetizing, the dish itself is quite tasty.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. dish, itself,
 - C. dish itself,
 - D. dish, itself

QUESTION 2

4. Fourteen-year-old Bill wanted to stay out late on Thursdays. His parents argued, however that an early curfew on school nights was reasonable, given the importance of his grades.

F. NO CHANGE

G. parents argued, however,

H. parents, argued however,

J. parents argued however,

QUESTION 3

7. If you consider all the objects that orbit the Sun, the bounds of the solar system stretch far beyond Pluto.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. stretch far, beyond
 - C. stretch, far beyond,
 - D. stretch, far beyond

QUESTION 4

8. When my sister makes brownies in the kitchen, each of the ingredients, in front of her sails into the mixing bowl as if by magic.

F. NO CHANGE

G. ingredients in front of her sails,

H. ingredients in front of her, sails

J. ingredients in front of her sails

QUESTION 5

9. The one, crucial, aspect of a good tent is that it should keep you dry in a storm.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. one crucial, aspect of a good tent
 - C. one crucial aspect of a good tent,
 - D. one crucial aspect of a good tent

QUESTION 6

10. Some people prefer bright yellow mustard on their hot dogs; others, prefer ketchup, relish, onions, or even chili.

F. NO CHANGE

G. dogs others

H. dogs; others

J. dogs, others

QUESTION 7

13. The committee took a long time to evaluate the benefits, and the drawbacks of the first proposal.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. benefits and, the drawbacks,
 - C. benefits and the drawbacks
 - D. benefits and the drawbacks,

QUESTION 8

15. Our hometown newspaper's editor, and resident visionary Daniel Rivera, argues that a free press is now more important than ever.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. editor, and resident visionary Daniel Rivera
 - C. editor and resident visionary Daniel Rivera,
 - D. editor and resident visionary, Daniel Rivera,

QUESTION 9

- 20.** My uncle comes from Malta a small Mediterranean island nation, with historical ties not only to the rest of Europe but also to Africa and the Middle East.
- F.** NO CHANGE
 - G.** Malta, a small Mediterranean island, nation
 - H.** Malta, a small Mediterranean island nation
 - J.** Malta; a small Mediterranean island nation