

Punctuation Rule #3 - Commas around Words Interrupting the Flow of Thought

Use a comma on both sides of words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence.

The car, **cleaned and repaired**, is ready to be sold.

Martha, **our new neighbor**, used to work as a bouncer at Remy's Tavern.

Taking long walks, **especially after dark**, helps me sort out my thoughts.

Usually you can "hear" words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence. However, if you are not sure if certain words are interrupters, remove them from the sentence. If it still makes sense without the words, you know the words are interrupters and that the information they give is nonessential. Such nonessential information is set off with commas. In the following sentence,

Susie Hall, who is my best friend, won a new car in the *Reader's Digest* sweepstakes.

The words *who is my best friend* are extra information, not needed to identify the subject of the sentence, *Susie Hall*. On the other hand, in the sentence

The woman who is my best friend won a new car in the *Reader's Digest* sweepstakes.

the words *who is my best friend* supply essential information needed for us to identify the woman. If the words were removed from the sentence, we would no longer know which woman won the sweepstakes. Commas are not used around such essential information.

Here is another example:

The Shining, a novel by Stephen King, is the scariest book I've ever read.

Here the words *a novel by Stephen King* are extra information, not needed to identify the subject of the sentence, *The Shining*. Commas go around such nonessential information. On the other hand, in the sentence

Stephen King's novel *The Shining* is the scariest book I've ever read.

the words *The Shining* are needed to identify the novel. Commas are not used around such essential information.

Most of the time you will be able to "hear" words that interrupt the flow of thoughts in a sentence and will not have to think about whether the words are essential or nonessential.

Directions: Add commas to set off interrupting words.

1. Friday is the deadline the absolute final deadline for your papers to be turned in.
2. The nursery rhyme told how the cow a weird creature jumped over the moon.
3. Tod voted the most likely to succeed in our high school graduating class has just made the front page of our newspaper. He was arrested with other members of the King Kongs a local motorcycle gang for creating a disturbance in the park.
4. Joan Thomas who was offered scholarships to three colleges will go to Mt. Holyoke in September.
5. Joan Thomas is the only senior who won scholarships to three colleges.
6. The city which interests me most is Hollywood.
7. The boys took their problem to the librarian who is an authority on reference books.
9. Friends who do favors for you may expect you to do favors for them.
- 10 The Welcoming Committee who make us feel at home in a strange school helped us through the first confusing days.
- 11 She is wearing the sweater that she received for Christmas.
12. Her new sweater which was a gift is two sizes too large.
13. All the tickets that had been sold were recalled.
14. Many people who settled America came to escape tyranny.
15. Animals frightened by thunder often try to hide.
16. I watched the crowd dispersing rapidly in all directions.
17. The crowd broke up suddenly dispersing rapidly in all directions.

Directions: Cross out the one commas that is not needed. Add the commas that are needed to set off interrupting words.

1. My sister's cat which she got from the animal shelter woke her, when her apartment caught on fire.
2. A bulging biology textbook its pages stuffed with notes, and handouts lay on the path to the school's parking lot.
3. A baked potato with its crispy skin and soft insides rates as one of my all time favorite, foods.