

Commas

It is important to ensure that the reader can comprehend the information you want to communicate. A useful way to achieve this is to insert commas into the sentence and allow the reader time to process the information. Commas are the 'breaths' of your writing. A useful tip is to read your text out loud, and every time you need to take a breath, you probably need to insert a comma.

When to use a comma:

Use a comma after an introductory word or phrase such as 'nevertheless' or 'furthermore'.

e.g. Thus, with the burden of the diversifying energy sector, infrastructure development might lag behind. Therefore, just less than 95% of SA's primary energy supply comes from these three fuel sources.

Use commas in the middle of a sentence to separate words that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

e.g. Factoring in the impacts of mining, *as part of a cradle-to-cradle model*, may not result in unlimited revenues but, *if the commitment was available*, other sustainable energy sources would begin to look more appealing.

Useful tip: Does the sentence still make sense if you ignore the words between the commas?

Use commas to separate two or more adjectives that describe the same noun.

e.g. The department reported impactful, informative research.

They lived in a white frame house. **No comma is needed here – see below:**

Useful tip: Would the sentence still make sense if 'and' was written between the adjectives?

Use a comma to shift between the main discourse and a quote.

e.g. Based on Eskom data, "...the pebble-bed nuclear reactors that Eskom want to build in SA would cost over R40 billion during their lifespan."

Comma splice error: Use of too many commas within a sentence.

It is important to not overuse commas within a single sentence, rather start a new sentence linking the ideas.

e.g. The patients in the study were informed of the side effects of the clinical trial, affecting the sense of smell and taste, which were outweighed by the benefits of the new medication in relieving symptoms associated with the disease of study.

The sentence above can easily be split into multiple sentences to form a cohesive paragraph:

e.g. The patients in the study were informed of all the side effects of the clinical trial, including a reduced sense of smell and taste. These potential side effects were outweighed by the benefits of the new medication in relieving symptoms associated with the disease of study.

Reference: UCT Upper Campus Writing Centre, 2015; Compiled by Ansuya Chetty, 2023. Revised, 2024.