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UNDERSTANDING  
PUNCTUATION, MECHANICS,  
AND SPELLING

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A **comma** is a punctuation mark that separates words or groups of words within sentences. In this way, commas keep ideas distinct from one another.

In earlier chapters, you learned to use a comma between two simple sentences (independent clauses) linked by a coordinating conjunction to form a compound sentence.

Some people are concerned about global warming, but others are not.

You also learned to use a comma after a dependent clause that comes before an independent clause in a complex sentence.

Although bears in the wild can be dangerous, hikers can take steps to protect themselves.

In addition, commas are used to set off directly quoted speech or writing from the rest of the sentence.

John F. Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

As you will learn in this chapter, commas have several other uses as well.

#### ■ Culture Clue

John F. Kennedy was the thirty-fifth president of the United States. He served from 1961 until his assassination in 1963.

### A Commas in a Series

Use commas to separate all elements in a **series** of three or more words or word groups (phrases or clauses).

Leyla, Zack, and Kathleen campaigned for Representative Lewis.

Leyla, Zack, or Kathleen will be elected president of Students for Lewis.

Leyla made phone calls, licked envelopes, and ran errands for the campaign.

Leyla is president, Zack is vice president, and Kathleen is treasurer.

### FOCUS Using Commas in a Series

Newspapers and magazines usually omit the comma before the coordinating conjunction in a series. However, in college writing you should always use a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

Leyla, Zack, and Kathleen worked on the campaign.

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Using Commas

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Exception: Do not use *any* commas if all the items in a series are separated by coordinating conjunctions.

Leyla **or** Zack **or** Kathleen will be elected president of Students for Lewis.

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### ◆ PRACTICE 31-1

Edit the following sentences for the use of commas in a series. If the sentence is correct, write *C* in the blank.

#### Examples

Costa Rica produces bananas, cocoa, and sugar cane.   *C*  

The pool rules state that there is no running/ or jumping/ or diving.

\_\_\_\_\_

1. The musician plays guitar bass and drums. \_\_\_\_\_
2. The organization's goals are feeding the hungry, housing the homeless and helping the unemployed find work. \_\_\_\_\_
3. *The Price Is Right*, *Let's Make a Deal*, and *Jeopardy!* are three of the longest-running game shows in television history. \_\_\_\_\_
4. In native Hawaiian culture, yellow was worn by the royalty red was worn by priests and a mixture of the two colors was worn by others of high rank. \_\_\_\_\_
5. The diary Anne Frank kept while her family hid from the Nazis is insightful, touching and sometimes humorous. \_\_\_\_\_
6. A standard bookcase is sixty inches tall forty-eight inches wide and twelve inches deep. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Most coffins manufactured in the United States are lined with bronze, or copper, or lead. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Young handsome and sensitive, Leonardo DiCaprio was the 1990s answer to the 1950s actor James Dean. \_\_\_\_\_

#### ON THE WEB

Visit *Exercise Central* at [bedfordstmartins.com/writingfirst](http://bedfordstmartins.com/writingfirst) for more practice.

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UNDERSTANDING  
PUNCTUATION, MECHANICS,  
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31 B

9. California's capital is Sacramento, its largest city is Los Angeles and its oldest settlement is San Diego. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Watching television, playing video games, and riding a bicycle are some of the average ten-year-old boy's favorite pastimes. \_\_\_\_\_

### ■ WRITING FIRST: Flashback

Look back at your response to the Writing First activity on page 515. If you have included a series of three or more words or word groups in any of your sentences, copy it here. Did you use commas correctly to separate elements in the series? If not, correct your punctuation. If no sentence includes a series, write a new sentence that does on the lines below.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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### B Commas with Introductory Phrases and Transitional Words and Phrases

Use a comma to set off an **introductory phrase** from the rest of the sentence.

In the event of a fire, proceed to the nearest exit.

Walking home, Nelida decided to change her major.

To keep fit, people should try to exercise regularly.

Also use commas to set off **transitional words or phrases** whether they appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence.

In fact, Thoreau spent only one night in jail.

He was, of course, bailed out by a friend.

He did spend more than two years at Walden Pond, however.

### FOCUS Using Commas in Direct Address

Always use commas to set off the name of someone whom you are **addressing** (speaking to) directly, whether the name appears at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence.

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