

the Writing Centers at Saint Mary's

Winona and Minneapolis

Grammar and Punctuation: **Commas**

#1 Use commas to separate out items in a series of three or more.

Example: *Dalton and Fool (2010) sought to analyze the effects of sucralose, saccharin, and aspartame.*

Explanation: The commas help to ensure clarity in the list.

#2 Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) to separate two independent clauses (complete ideas with subjects and verbs).

Example: Johnson et al. (2013) evaluated the BMI of study participants monthly, and the researchers noted a 1.6% increase in BMI over the length of the study (p. 235).

Explanation: The comma and the conjunction indicate to the reader that a complete sentence has ended and another will follow.

#3 Use a comma to set off a subordinate clause (dependent clause) at the beginning of a sentence. Subordinate clauses begin with words like *when, since, if, because, although, even, etc.*

Example: *When researchers studied various artificial sweeteners, they found that only three raised insulin significantly (Smith, 2014).*

Explanation: The clause needs to be separated to make the beginning of the independent clause (complete sentence) clear.

#4 Use a comma to set off an introductory element (phrase) like infinitive phrases and prepositional phrases.

Examples: To understand how artificial sweeteners function in humans, Johnson et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal study over the course of five years.

In the study, researchers found that artificial sweeteners affected several metabolic processes (Johnson et al., 2013).

Explanation: These are phrases that introduce the independent clause, but they are not essential to the meaning.

#5 Use a comma to set off a parenthetical element in a complete sentence.

Examples: The studies, however, illustrated several health risks associated with artificial sweeteners (Dalton & Fool, 2010).

Johnson et al. (2013) concluded that artificial sweeteners, such as those found in diet sodas, spiked insulin.

Explanation: These are elements that can be removed from the sentence without changing its meaning. They often make the sentence better, but the main clause works without them.