

Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services

Six Ways To Use the Comma

Use of the comma when composing a document can be a source of frustration. Generally speaking, a comma should be placed where the reader would logically take a breath before continuing, or where there is a change in direction of thought within the sentence. In modern English, it is best to use the comma frugally. Avoid the overuse of commas. Too many commas can intrude on the flow of the statement and make it hard to grasp the gist of what is being said.

- 1. Use the comma in a list or series within a sentence. MCPS uses the serial comma (i.e., a comma before a conjunction like *and* or *or* in a list of three or more items).**

Example: Teachers, students, and staff gathered for a special assembly to welcome the new principal.

- 2. Use a comma to separate parts of a compound sentence.**

Example: We have 131 elementary schools, and all the schools belong to a cluster.

- 3. Use a comma to separate a sentence with a dependent clause.**

Example: The students were required to take the class, except for those with an excuse from their parents.

- 4. Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives that describe a noun (i.e., when the adjectives could be joined by the word *and* without changing the meaning of the sentence).**

Example: The students stayed inside for recess to avoid the hot, muggy weather.

- 5. Use a comma before an introductory phrase, especially if misreading is likely.**

Example: After reading, the students worked on their essays.

However, a comma is wrong in this case: Walking along with us were three ducks.

- 6. Use a comma after a date that includes a year.**

Example: The tragedy of September 11, 2001, will be remembered by all of us.

For more details and examples of how and when to use the comma, consult the [MCPS Editorial Stylebook, 2011](#) edition, and the *Gregg Reference Manual*, 10th edition.