

USE A COMMA

Before a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS) when it joins two independent clauses:

We swam with the dolphins, **and** we fed the whales.

After an introductory element:

However, I enjoyed feeding the whales the most.
Because I had taken photography, I got some great pictures.

To set apart nonessential items:

My mother, **who is afraid of the water**, refused to get into the ocean.

To set apart conjunctive adverbs that are asides:

This vacation, **therefore**, was the best my family has ever taken.

To separate three or more items in a series:

I saw **seahorses, starfish, and even a stingray**.

To separate two or more adjectives of equal weight:

The **dry, soft** sand felt wonderful on my skin.

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To separate a quote from the rest of a sentence:

"I caught a fish," I yelled.

To separate digits in a number:

I counted at least 10 schools of fish. With approximately 100 fish per school, that equals about **1,000** fish.

To separate parts of a geographical location:

Even though this vacation was wonderful, I was happy to get home to **Bakersfield, California**.

To separate parts of an address:

I was most happy when we arrived at our home at **127 Gardenwood Lane, Bakersfield, CA 90010**.

To separate parts of a full date:

We got home the day before my birthday, which is **August 18, 1989**.

To set off a title when it appears after a name:

Because I was so sunburned, I spent my birthday with my personal physician, **Marcus Welby, M.D.**

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USE A SEMICOLON

To join two independent clauses:

Swimming is great exercise; it works out both the heart and lungs.

Before a conjunctive adverb joining two independent clauses:

Swimming is also enjoyable; **therefore**, many people continue to exercise.

To separate items in a series already containing commas:

At the beach, we saw **many strange creatures; ate many strange foods; and explored the malls, the thrift shops, and the antique stores.**

USE A COLON

To introduce a list, even of one:

Hint: Do not use a colon after the words *such as* and *including*.

The following items are useful at the beach: **a towel, some sunscreen, and bottled water.**

At the beach, I noticed a most curious person: **a man in a clown's suit.**

USE A DASH

To add and set off information:

My best adventure at the beach—**meeting Alanis Morissette**—was also my most memorable.

She even agreed to sing my favorite song—**“Hand in My Pocket.”**

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