



DeYoung Consulting Services

Helping People Learn up to Their Potential

Did you know the comma is the most frequently used punctuation mark? Because of its wide use, knowing how to use it correctly can improve your writing.

Commas serve several purposes that most of us know intuitively. They can:

Introduce a word, phrase, or clause

You are planning to vote, aren't you?

Separate clauses or ideas joined by conjunctions such as *and*, *or*, or *but*

I'm planning to vote, and then I'll go back to my office.

Enclose phrases

Election Day, which is always on the Tuesday following the first Monday in November, falls on November 7 this year.

Some other uses of commas are more confusing, though.

Using commas in a series

Putting a comma between the last two items in a series is a matter of preference. Journalists usually omit the last comma while academicians and business people tend to include it. Both methods are correct. Just make sure you are consistent with the standard you use.

Journalistic standard *The colors of the flag are red, white and blue.*

Academic standard *The colors of the flag are red, white, and blue.*

Using commas with *which* and *that*

Pay attention when using commas before a modifying clause beginning with *which* or *that*. Clauses beginning with *that* are restrictive and should never be preceded by a comma. Restrictive clauses are essential to the meaning of the sentence.

The Secretary of State has a Web site that tells you where to vote.

Clauses beginning with *which* are usually nonrestrictive and require a comma. They are not necessary to convey the meaning of a sentence.

DeYoung Consulting Services ▪ (612) 822-8872 ▪ 4834 Park Ave.
Minneapolis, MN 55417 ▪ deyoung4@aol.com

Churches are often polling places on Election Day, which is the Tuesday following the first Monday in November.

If you have any questions on commas or any other writing topic, let me know.

And please check out this month's presentation pointer on my Web site at <http://www.deyoungconsultingservices.com/pointers.htm>.

Karen DeYoung is President/CEO of DeYoung Consulting Services, which provides quality learning experiences for individuals and groups. We develop training materials and activities that advance individual, team, and organizational learning. Our work is done with integrity, reliability, and accountability.

From DeYoung Consulting Services: Avoiding Comma Confusion