

**Getting to Know Your Commas**  
**Rules &**  
**Practice Exercises<sup>1</sup>**

**CRITICAL COMMAS**

**Rule 1: Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining two main clauses.**

*Example:* The prosecutor spoke about the defendant's motive, and the jury listened carefully.

*Practice Exercises:*

- A. The defendant had erected a "No Trespassing" sign on his front door and the City of Olympia had posted a "No Trespassing" sign at the entrance to the dirt road leading to the defendant's home.
- B. Six-week-old information regarding a grow operation has been found acceptable and the court has been willing to project that even four-month-old information could be sufficiently reliable before becoming too stale to support probable cause.
- C. Jane Doe claims that her anxiety level has increased and that she has had to meet with a therapist twice a week since the incident.
- D. Washington courts have vigorously applied the rule against intrusion into private affairs and have shifted the burden of proof to the state to justify its intrusion.

**Rule 2: Use a comma to set off introductory phrases or clauses from the main clause.**

*Example:* Using their overhead lights and sirens, the police followed the defendant out of the area.

*Practice Exercises:*

- E. Without the illegally obtained evidence of the alleged "smell search" the affidavit in support of the search warrant contains insufficient evidence to support probable cause.
- F. In *Johnson* a "No Trespassing" sign, fenced property, and a chain link gate manifested a reasonable expectation of privacy.
- G. Consequently the plaintiff student could bring a private cause of action.
- H. When the information in an affidavit used to gain a search warrant is the fruit of an illegal search the warrant is invalid unless the remaining information can stand alone to establish probable cause.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples from *Just Writing* and *The Legal Writing Handbook* by Laurel Currie Oates and Anne Enquist.

- I. To determine if Panama is a more convenient forum the court will consider the private factors in our case.

**Rule 4: Use a comma to set off nonrestrictive phrases or clauses.**

*Example:* Officer Bates, acting as a decoy, remained outside on the sidewalk.

*Practice Exercises:*

- J. A California case which is the key to the issue here is *Marks v. Whitney*.
- K. Unlike the doctor in *Grimsby* who had an established relationship with the patient, the state trooper did not have an established relationship with the Smiths.

**BASIC COMMAS**

**Rule 5: Set off nonrestrictive appositives with commas.**

*Example:* A corrections officer called Diane Cummins, the defendant's girlfriend.

*Practice Exercises:*

- L. Ms. Maye a U.S. citizen grew up in Korea but later moved to the United States at the age of twenty.
- M. The final element whether the couple suffered actual severe emotional distress will be difficult to prove.
- N. Ms. Parsons asked her sister Pamela Barney if Amy could live with Ms. Barney until the mother and daughter could resolve their differences.

**Rule 7: Use a comma or commas to set off transitional or interrupting words and phrases.**

*Example:* The trial court, however, imposed an exceptional sentence of thirty months.

*Practice Exercises:*

- O. One could infer therefore that the billing procedures were there for her to see.
- P. Other cases on the other hand suggest that the evidence necessary to satisfy the second element may come from any source.
- Q. The prosecutor despite several warnings from the judge continued to badger the witness.
- R. The jury however believed the police officer.

- S. The defendant testified that she did not reach under the seat of her car however the jury believed the police officer.

**Rule 9: Use a comma or commas to set off phrases of contrast.**

*Example:* Adams initially indicated that he, not Wilson, was involved in the robbery.

**Rule 10: Use commas between items in a series.**

*Example:* Wong had no money, identification, or jewelry.

*Practice Exercises:*

- T. Yesler later identified James in a photo montage in a lineup and at trial.
- U. The prosecutor's comment of disbelief was directed only at the defense theory of mistaken identity not at the credibility of a witness.
- V. The sanity commission concluded that Thomas was incapable of perceiving the nature of his conduct at the time of the offense was unable to distinguish right from wrong but was competent to stand trial.
- W. The 90-day "time for trial" rule under CrR 3.3 (c)(1) began to run when Lewis was arraigned not when the State filed the information.

**Rule 12: Use commas according to convention with dates, addresses, and names of geographical locations.**

*Example:* The land in Roswell, New Mexico, was surveyed on October 4, 1991, and purchased less than a month later.

*Practice Exercises:*

- X. The string of robberies began in San Diego California and ended in Tacoma Washington after the defendant was picked up on a traffic violation.

**Review of all comma rules:**

1. The cocaine’s wholesale value was \$17,000 and its street value was \$80,000.
2. Viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution the trial court found the essential elements of the crime.
3. Trooper Yesler who investigated the accident testified that the “primary causal factor” of the accident had been Morgan’s intoxicated state.
4. The state trooper who investigated the accident testified that the “primary causal factor” of the accident had been Morgan’s intoxicated state.
5. The only witness Ann Peters had discussed her potential criminal liability with the prosecutor.
6. An appellate court may however request additional evidence before rendering a decision on a case.
7. Chavez says he saw a man lying on the ground not on the street.
8. Thomas pulled out his gun aimed it and fired.
9. Johnson moved to Las Vegas Nevada on July 21 1999 so he could attend college there.

**Answers to Practice Exercises**

- A. The defendant had erected a “No Trespassing” sign on his front door, and the City of Olympia had posted a “No Trespassing” sign at the entrance to the dirt road leading to the defendant’s home.
- B. Six-week-old information regarding a grow operation has been found acceptable, and the court has been willing to project that even four-month-old information could be sufficiently reliable before becoming too stale to support probable cause.
- C. Jane Doe claims that her anxiety level has increased and that she has had to meet with a therapist twice a week since the incident. **(NO CHANGE.)**
- D. Washington courts have vigorously applied the rule against intrusion into private affairs and have shifted the burden of proof to the state to justify its intrusion. **(NO CHANGE.)**
- E. Without the illegally obtained evidence of the alleged “smell search,” the affidavit in support of the search warrant contains insufficient evidence to support probable cause.
- F. In *Johnson*, a “No Trespassing” sign, fenced property, and a chain link gate manifested a reasonable expectation of privacy.

- G. Consequently, the plaintiff student could bring a private cause of action.
- H. When the information in an affidavit used to gain a search warrant is the fruit of an illegal search, the warrant is invalid unless the remaining information can stand alone to establish probable cause.
- I. To determine if Panama is a more convenient forum, the court will consider the private factors in our case.
- J. A California case **that** is the key to the issue here is *Marks v. Whitney*.
- K. Unlike the doctor in *Grimmsby*, who had an established relationship with the patient, the state trooper did not have an established relationship with the Smiths.
- L. Ms. Maye, a U.S. citizen, grew up in Korea, but later moved to the United States at the age of twenty.
- M. The final element, whether the couple suffered actual severe emotional distress, will be difficult to prove.
- N. **(If only one sister)** Ms. Parsons asked her sister, Pamela Barney, if Amy could live with Ms. Barney until the mother and daughter could resolve their differences.
- (If more than one sister)** Ms. Parsons asked her sister Pamela Barney if Amy could live with Ms. Barney until the mother and daughter could resolve their differences.
- O. One could infer, therefore, that the billing procedures were there for her to see.
- P. Other cases, on the other hand, suggest that the evidence necessary to satisfy the second element may come from any source.
- Q. The prosecutor, despite several warnings from the judge, continued to badger the witness.
- R. The jury, however, believed the police officer.
- S. The defendant testified that she did not reach under the seat of her car; however, the jury believed the police officer.
- T. Yesler later identified James in a photo montage, in a lineup, and at trial.

- U. The prosecutor's comment of disbelief was directed only at the defense theory of mistaken identity, not at the credibility of a witness.
  - V. The sanity commission concluded that Thomas was incapable of perceiving the nature of his conduct at the time of the offense, was unable to distinguish right from wrong, but was competent to stand trial.
  - W. The 90-day "time for trial" rule under CrR 3.3 (c)(1) began to run when Lewis was arraigned, not when the State filed the information.
  - X. The string of robberies began in San Diego, California, and ended in Tacoma, Washington, after the defendant was picked up on a traffic violation.
1. The cocaine's wholesale value was \$17,000, and its street value was \$80,000.
  2. Viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, the trial court found the essential elements of the crime.
  3. Trooper Yesler, who investigated the accident, testified that the "primary causal factor" of the accident had been Morgan's intoxicated state.
  4. The state trooper who investigated the accident testified that the "primary causal factor" of the accident had been Morgan's intoxicated state. **(NO CHANGE.)**
  5. The only witness, Ann Peters, had discussed her potential criminal liability with the prosecutor.
  6. An appellate court may, however, request additional evidence before rendering a decision on a case.
  7. Chavez says he saw a man lying on the ground, not on the street.
  8. Thomas pulled out his gun, aimed it, and fired.
  9. Johnson moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, on July 21, 1999, so he could attend college there.