

FROM THE LEGAL WRITING CLINIC
WRITING TIP OF THE WEEK

COMMAS WITH INTRODUCTORY CLAUSES



A sentence often includes both a main and a subordinate clause. The most obvious difference between the two is that a main clause can stand alone as a complete sentence, whereas a subordinate clause cannot. In addition, a subordinate clause often begins with a subordinating conjunction, such as “although,” “because,” or “if.”

A subordinate clause that introduces a main clause is called an “introductory clause.” Use a comma to separate a long introductory clause (four or more words) from the main clause.

- Although Mr. Jones’s job title did not change, his responsibilities changed significantly.
- In his Motion for Summary Judgment, the Defendant argued that the statute of limitations had expired.
- Glaring at the Defendant, the witness recounted how he had invested his entire retirement savings in the Defendant’s company.
- Because the Plaintiff has failed to state a claim for relief, the Court should find for the Defendant.

You should also use a comma when you begin a sentence with a short prepositional phrase (even if fewer than four words) or a single transitional word.

- In Bloodsaw, the court recognized non-consensual medical testing as a “basic” invasion of privacy.
- However, the plaintiff did not provide any evidence of bad faith.
- Therefore, the legislature did not intend for the statute to cover access to websites.

Anne Enquist & Laurel Currie Oates, Just Writing 219-21 (4th ed. 2013); Laurel Currie Oates & Anne Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook 653-55 (5th ed. 2010); Lawmanac—Clickable Help for Legal Writers, “Punctuation, Capitalization & Typeface” (follow “Comma” hyperlink; then follow “Setting Off Introductory Clauses or Phrases” hyperlink) (C. Edward Good ed., 2009).