

Commas and Dashes

Generally speaking, commas help organize parts of a sentence. While they often signal the natural pauses in the flow of a sentence, they are not breath marks; casually sprinkling commas over a long or convoluted sentence will not make the sentence more readable. Instead, think of commas as

- links between ideas in a given sentence, whether those ideas are expressed in clauses, phrases, or single words, or
- dividers that set apart clauses, phrases, or single words.

Linking commas

1. Always use a comma to link a dependent (or subordinate) clause to an independent (or main) clause, **if the dependent clause comes first**.

Although it might be expected that age, income, and education would have the greatest influence on climate change belief, the greater predictors of climate change belief are values, political affiliation, and worldviews.

2. You should also use a comma to link two independent clauses when you join those clauses with a coordinating conjunction...

Many people indicate belief in climate change, but fewer are willing to act in climate-friendly ways.

3. However, if the clauses are short you may omit the comma.

Many studies on climate change belief exist so a meta-analysis is useful.

4. Use commas to link three or more elements in a series...

The demographic variables applied in the study were age, education, income, race, and sex. It is important to determine useful correlates, choose relevant studies to analyze, and examine general themes.

Source: Hornsey, Matthew et al. "Meta-analyses of the determinants and outcomes of belief in climate change." *Nature Climate Change*, February 2016.

Dividing commas

1. Commas also **set apart** various components of the sentence from the main idea. Use a comma to set off an introductory word or a contextualizing phrase.

In developing Indigenous youth leadership programs, it is important to recognize the value of traditional, experiential knowledge.

2. However, if the phrase is short, you may omit the comma.

In outdoor education youth acquire formal and informal knowledge.

3. In the same way, use commas to set apart words, phrases, or clauses that add extra but non-essential information to a sentence.

Youth revealed a strong interest in past indigenous leaders, particularly in their ways of knowing, and the process by which these leaders learned their lessons.

Source: Liskers, Michael. "Giving Voice to First Nations Youth Leadership." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, XXXVII, 1 (2017).

Dashes

1. Use a dash to set off an **interruption** in your sentence.

For the Èwè people of Ghana, storytelling sessions create a platform for lessons in important traditions—related to morality, ethical behaviour, and history—and thus the transmission of cultural values.

2. In addition to setting off complex "by the way" phrases, dashes can be used to emphasize a **change in thought or emotion** in a sentence.

The performance of storytelling songs unites communities—but decreasing attendance at storytelling sessions means that local traditional leaders must work hard to attract participants.

3. Dashes may also be used to **link a list** to the main part of a sentence.

These oral performing practices enable an exploration of human nature and teach valuable lessons—such as "how to comport oneself within the community, how to overcome obstacles, how to create beauty and renew the soul, and how to be alone without feeling lost" (96).

Source: Gbadbe, Divine Kwasi and D. Rose Elder, "Story-telling Songs of the Èwè-Dòmè of Ghana." *African Music*, Vol. II, Issue 1, Jan. 1, 2019.