

Using commas with introductory and concluding phrases or clauses

The use of commas after introductory phrases and clauses moves us into the territory of choice. Heavy punctuators will use commas after nearly every introductory phrase or clause; light punctuators will try to use as few as possible, often using none. It is standard to use commas after rich or complex introductory material and to omit them after short introductory phrases. If you decide to omit commas, be sure the meaning of your sentence remains clear.

Concluding phrases and clauses are not punctuated with commas when they are restrictive or necessary to a complete understanding of the sentence. When they are non-restrictive, or may be de-emphasized, set them apart with commas.

Examples

1. *In the light of this new evidence*, we will need to reexamine the garage door.
2. *Whether or not the boys had been making a joke*, they now seemed to understand the gravity of their situation.
3. *On the driveway* they found an old weathered key.
4. *Long ago*, it had been used to secure a farmhouse *that belonged to the MacLean family*.
5. *After the catastrophic fire*, it had been removed by the family dog, *a schnauzer*.

Sample Sentences

Punctuate appropriately.

1. After a heated discussion about contemporary politics Wally had fashioned a hole in the wall.
2. Having carefully examined the damage Davis who was the fixit for the fraternity decided he would fix it.

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3. When he had gathered up newspaper, string, and plaster he sat on a chair in front of the hole and filled it with wadded paper around which he had tied a loop of string.
4. Holding the string attached to the paper Davis began to fill the remaining space with plaster.
5. When the plaster began to compress the paper he pulled the string taut and maintained a flat surface.
6. The next day he cut away the string from the dried plaster and smoothed the job with a final coat.
7. To finish the task all he needed to do was match the paint a difficult job.

The following sentences are incorrectly punctuated. In what way(s)?

8. Having served his town, faithfully and well Grady was given a golden watch, at retirement.
9. In the beginning there was light; then there was dark.
10. Because you never took a calculus course, you have missed, one of the joys of mathematics.
11. Once again Ken voiced his distaste for Johnson's only novel *Rasselas*.