

Using Commas with Adjectives

Use a comma between consecutive **coordinate adjectives**. Don't use a comma between **cumulative adjectives**.

Coordinate adjectives modify a noun equally and separately. When coordinate, each adjective modifies the same noun separately and equally. The word "and" could join each adjective. They make sense if rearranged.

Examples

1. Kerry believed in *luxurious, unrestrained* growth.
2. *The spoiled, fat* cats found the garden full of *cool, dark* shadows.
3. Across the fence, Mr. Schaeffer viewed a *wild, overgrown, unruly* yard.

Cumulative adjectives build upon one another and should not be separated with commas. If you reorder cumulative adjectives, the result will not read smoothly.

Examples

1. *The two tall* women were fishing.
2. They had high expectations for *the nearby older Irish* couple.
3. *Their tasteful ten-foot* rods promised success.

Sample Sentences

Appropriately punctuate the adjectives italicized below.

1. Kate was a *brave*, *honest*, and *wise* woman.
2. Arnon, with *his expensive*, *red* sneakers, walked to *Kate's humble* home.

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Comment [1]: The positions of "expensive" and "red" are interchangeable, so they seem consecutive and coordinate; nevertheless, many writers would not use this comma.

using commas with adjectives

3. At the doorstep, they started a *colorful*, *in-depth* discussion about toads.

4. Arnon had not seen *many large* toads that year.

5. Kate had seen *several smallish tree* toads earlier that day.

6. *Kate's graceless*, *overbearing* brother interrupted the *two young friend's* discussion.

7. "You guys know where the *great big barking* pig has got to?"

8. A *wondrous*, *outrageous* pig of that description lived on the *old*, *decrepit* farm across the creek.

9. Arnon had seen the pig down in the *lush*, *green* meadow close by the favorite spot for toads.

10. Kate wondered whether the *aggressive*, *overgrown* pig had made a *tasty*, *quick* treat of the toads.

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Comment [2]: These adjectives appear to be coordinate, but many authors would not separate them.