

The Comma

A COMMA IS a kind of delicate kink in time, a pause within a sentence, a chance to catch your breath. A curvaceous acrobat, it capers over the page. A comma keeps apart two words, or bits of thought, that would confuse if they touched. Some of the instances calling for commas are inflexible, and the only way to get around them is to find another way to state and arrange your ideas. Other uses, though, are intended to make the reader's experience easier, and are up to the writer's discretion or whim. (Karen Elizabeth Gordon, *The New Well-Tempered Sentence*)

The Basics

● To separate the words in a series

The Indie Market has locally-made jewelry, knitwear, and art for sale.

● Before the conjunctions and, but, and or when forming a compound sentence

I went to the holiday market to buy a James Gann cow painting, but I also needed to have one of Karen Flood's bird illustrations.

● To set off introductory words and phrases

Yes, the Narrowsburg Indie Market has moved to a new space behind the DVAA.

Passing the gift wrap table, Hilary noticed yet another Mayer Wasner cardigan that she just had to have.

● To set off appositives (a group of words that tells about the noun)

Brian and Jen, the generous donors of the holiday gift wrap, are also selling lamps. Sentence diagrams, a dying art form, is being revived by Good Loving Woman.

● To set off nouns in direct address

It is great to have you back in the area, Julia.

● **To set off direct quotations in a sentence**

“I’m a sucker for weaving,” confided Cal.

“I stayed home from school,” said Gabe, “so that I could bake.”

Leila insisted, “The best teddy bear is a handmade one.”

● **Between the name of a city or town and its state**

Narrowsburg, NY

● **Between the day and year in a date**

December 13, 2014

● **After the greeting in a friendly letter, and after the closing in all letters**

Dear Santa,

All warmth,

● **To avoid confusion**

For most the holiday is about giving.

For most, the holiday is about giving

● **Comma Caution**

There are many more ways to use commas, but the biggest caution is to avoid overusing them. Just because you pause while reading, doesn’t mean that a comma is appropriate. You know you’re safe if you can apply one of these rules.

“I have spent most of the day putting in a comma and the rest of the day taking it out.”

- Oscar Wilde

* For further reading, check out Karen Elizabeth Gordon’s book. She devotes 37 dynamically-gorgeous pages in her punctuation handbook book to commas. All of her books are Good Loving Woman faves.

