



# Punctuation: commas (,)

Commas are separation marks and are used to indicate a short break in a sentence. The current accepted style is to use them as little as possible and only when they are needed to help the reader understand the meaning more clearly. If you read your work aloud, you will be able to hear a slight pause where you should make a break with a comma in your writing.

## 1. Use commas to separate items in a list so that the meaning is clear

### Examples:

- Shabani is an enthusiastic, dedicated, hardworking student.
- Foods like chocolate, buns, icecream and cake have a high sugar and fat content.\*

\*Although traditional grammar recommends that a comma is not used before 'and' in the last item in a list, it is becoming more widely accepted to place a comma (called the 'Oxford comma') before 'and' or 'or' in a list of three or more items, e.g. '...icecream, and cake' in the second sentence above. Whatever you decide, it's important that you are consistent in your use of commas.

## 2. A comma is usually placed either after, or before and after, a link word or phrase

### Examples:

- *Nevertheless*, the ethical issues associated with gene therapy must still be addressed.
- It is clear, *on the other hand*, that its application will save many lives.

## 3. A comma can be used to separate main ideas in a sentence from additional phrases or clauses

### Example:

After his appearance before the tribunal, Nicolae refused to discuss the matter with the press.

## 4. Use commas to separate ideas in compound sentences where two or more clauses are joined together by 'and', 'but' or 'for'

### Example:

- Kim (2001, p65) adds that for managers to be successful the core competency needed is the ability to focus on a sound plan, but she does not explain this further.

## 5. Commas are generally used to introduce a quotation

### Example:

- According to Shakespeare, 'All the world's a stage.'

### **Activity**

Decide where the commas need to be placed in the following paragraph.

Supportive communication therefore is not seen just as a 'nice person technique' but a proven competitive advantage for both managers and organisations. Moreover delivering outstanding customer service is almost impossible without supportive communication. According to Kember (1999, p 15) communication skills '...may actually be significantly more important than cognitive ability and technical expertise combined.'

*See answers below*

### **Answers**

Supportive communication, therefore, is not seen just as a 'nice person technique', but a proven, competitive advantage for both managers and organisations. Moreover, delivering outstanding customer service is almost impossible without supportive communication. According to Kember (1999, p 15), communication skills '...may actually be significantly more important than cognitive ability and technical expertise combined.'