

COMMA DON'T!

Occasionally a student will find that he has a tendency to use too many commas: in fact, sometimes he is “comma happy.” Often this problem arises because he is punctuating by ear. He places a comma wherever he senses a pause. This method will work to a limited extent, but basically it is so haphazard that the result is sloppy punctuation. Besides, the rules are not so difficult that they cannot be kept to mind. Here is a general rule that will help any writer:

RULE: DO NOT USE A COMMA UNLESS YOU CAN SEE A CLEAR, POSITIVE REASON FOR IT.

Phrased another way, the rule for any comma you are certain of would be “When in doubt, leave it out.” Here are six examples of overpunctuation, or situations where the comma is unnecessary:

RULE: DO NOT USE A COMMA:

1. TO SEPARATE A SUBJECT FROM ITS VERB.

Example of error: The best years of your life, are those spent at college.

2. TO SEPARATE A VERB FROM ITS COMPLETION.

Example of error: Years later you will realize, how happy you were.

3. TO SEPARATE PARTS OF A COMPOUND PREDICATE.

Example of error: In college you don't have to earn a living, or be at the same place from eight to five every day.

4. TO SEPARATE TWO WORDS OR PHRASES JOINED BY A COORDINATE CONJUNCTION.

Examples of error: Both students, and faculty enjoy the two-week vacation at Christmas time, and the one week holiday at Easter.

5. TO SEPARATE A NOUN FROM ITS FIRST MODIFIER.

Examples of error: Clearly college represents four of the very best, years of your life. You should find them a rich, rewarding experience. (In these sentences the comma after rich is necessary: the other two are not.)

6. AFTER MISTAKEN PAUSES ESPECIALLY WITH ADVERBS.

Examples of error: In later years, you will remember, particularly, the long summer vacation. (None of the commas is necessary.)

. Comma Don'ts Worksheet

Directions: Circle the incorrect or superfluous commas.

Trojans trounce Bruins 42-0

State College, October 27.—USC's undefeated, untied and unscored-upon eleven, today overwhelmed UCLA with seven touchdowns, 42-0. This victory clinched the league title, and also marked the eighteenth consecutive win for the Trojans. Most of the 40,172 fans here in the stadium today would have to agree, that USC is a strong contender for the national title this year. On this frosty autumn afternoon the crowd was treated to an almost professional display of football power, and finesse.

The star of today's game was, clearly, MacGregor, USC's All-Conference fullback for the last two seasons. The Trojans are going to miss this big, bone crunching, bruiser. Twenty seven times, he carried the mail through the Bruins line. Not once, did he gain less than four yards, and his average for the game, was 9.7 yards per carry. He played fifty full, jarring, minutes of the game, and scored five times. His defensive linebacking was just as rugged as his offensive play, and must have impressed the crowd, and the various professional scouts, here today.

Disaster struck UCLA on the first play from scrimmage. The kickoff had been returned to the 32 by Jukes, a cool, poised, and dependable player for UCLA all afternoon. On the very next play, a buck lateral, Jukes ran to his right, and then over right tackle. There he was met by MacGregor, whose thumping tackle, produced the first of UCLA's nine fumbles, seven of which were recovered, like this one, by USC. Five plays later, MacGregor took the ball on his 12, and boomed through for his first score. The UCLA cheering section could see already, the handwriting on the wall. This was, clearly USC's day, and even the most ardent Bruins fan had to admit, that, something would have to be done to stop MacGregor.

Directions: As before, circle the incorrect or superfluous commas, but watch particularly for the type of construction or phrasing which tripped you up on the preceding exercise.

Trojans trounce Bruins Continued

USC kicked off again. Jukes took the ball on his 10, but once again fumbled when MacGregor's vicious tackle, slammed him to the ground in the 21. Alert, for just a mishap, Kallikak of UCLA had been following right behind Jukes, and now pounced on the loose ball. However, the next three plays netted only three, measly, hard earned, yards, and UCLA was forced to kick. Kallikak's punt was high, and off to one side, going out of bounds at midfield, where USC took over. When the Trojans marched, to their second touchdown four plays later, the only question in the minds of the spectators, was just how high the score would go.

And so, the game went: a fumble by a UCLA back, a recovery by USC, and then a relentless drive down the field, and over the goal line. Even the finest efforts of Jukes and Kallikak, were not enough, to halt the Trojans. Facing a huge, hammering, hulk of fullback like MacGregor, any team in the country would have had a rough time. The five touchdowns that he scored, came, from 12, 7, 13, 41, and 29 yards out, respectively. When this young man, finally, left the game, both Trojan, and Bruin fans got to their feet, and cheered him off.

With USC leading in the second half by a score of 28-0, Coach "Si" Legree of USC made sure, that every player on his bench, got into the game. Although the final score indicates, how lopsided the game was, USC fans had the satisfaction of cheering home, as swift, powerful and almost frightening, a troop of players, as this stadium will see for a long time to come.