🎯 Commas Cheat Sheet – Extra Info Edition (Nonessentials)

👑Easy Points Alert: Usually 5 ACT questions/2-4 SAT questions

Always ADD commas around non-essential words/phrases
Always REMOVE commas around essential words/phrasees

ACT/SAT love to mess with you on extra info—side notes, nicknames, "by the way" stuff. They'll ghost commas you actually need or slap commas around essential info just to catch you slippin'. Your job? Spot the flavor vs. the main course. 🍕🔥 Mark the extras, protect the essentials.

Quick Hack: mentally yeet the phrase and see if the sentence still slaps.
✅ Sentence still works → commas belong.
❌ Sentence changes meaning → leave commas chillin', don't touch.

Rule 1. Wrap the Extras in Commas

What it means: Extra info = bonus flavor, not the main point.

Quick test: Take the phrase out. Does it make sense? ✅ Yes → commas belong. ❌ No → leave , out.

Example: *"My dog, a giant fluffball, loves belly rubs."*

Here's the Tea (Step-by-step explanation): Commas are needed

- Main idea (clause): *"My dog loves belly rubs."*
- Extra flavor: *"a giant fluffball"* — renames/describes the dog, but you don't need it to know which dog. (It doesn't turn your dog into a new dog if you remove, FR, right?)

💬 **Why commas matter:** 👀✨
Without commas: *"My dog a giant fluffball loves belly rubs."* ❌ → *looks like a word salad and makes "a giant fluffball" sound essential, when it's just bonus cuteness.*

- Reads like a hot mess
- Can you peep that extra flavor? Yup, so add in those commas!
- Rule of thumb: Wrap nicknames, side notes, extra descriptions in commas.

Rule 2. Names & Side Deets (AKA Appositives) → Bubble 'Em in Commas!

What it means: Sometimes a sentence drops in extra info about a person, place, or thing—like a nickname or a "by the way" detail. Think of it as a tiny baby interruption in your sentence.

Quick test: Remove the extra info. Does it make sense? ✅ → commas belong. ❌ → essential, leave out.

Example: *The P.E. teacher, Ms. Kristen, blows her whistle—hard."*

Here's the Tea (Step-by-step explanation): Commas are needed

1. **Main noun:** "The P.E. teacher"
2. **Side deet (appositive):** "Ms. Kristen" → renames the teacher, but we'd still know who we're talking about without it

💬 **Why commas matter:**
Without commas: "*The P.E. teacher Ms. Kristen blows her whistle—hard.*" ❌

- Feels like you need the name to know which teacher—nope!
- Name seems essential, even though it's just bonus flavor
- Rule of thumb: Drop in nicknames, names, or extra details that aren't essential? Wrap them in commas—think of commas as **bubble wrap for your bonus info**.

Rule 3. Don't Comma Essential Info

What it means: Some info is **mission-critical**—you need it to know exactly what the sentence is talking about. Don't slap commas around it, or you'll confuse the reader. ⚠️

Quick test: Remove the commas. Does the sentence still make sense exactly as intended? ❌ If it changes meaning, it's essential → no commas. ✅ Sentence still works → commas okay

Example: *"Somewhere in the distance, a single facepalm echoes."*

Here's the Tea (Step-by-step explanation): Commas are not needed

1. Essential info: "in the distance" → tells us where the facepalm happens
2. Extra info? Hard Nope—everything is needed

💬 **Why commas matter:**
Without commas: "*Somewhere, in the distance, a single facepalm echoes.*" ❌

- Makes "in the distance" look like bonus flavor…actually, it's critical to get sentence
- Rule of thumb: If info is needed to identify the noun or clarify meaning → leave commas out.

Summary: Down & Dirty Version

1. Read sentence + all answer choices.
2. Mentally yeet the extra info phrase. ✅ Yes → commas belong. ❌ No → leave commas out.

Pro tip 1: scope the main clause first; extras just vibe on the side. Yeet the extra, hug the important stuff.

Pro tip 2: If the word 'however' appears, it ALWAYS needs to be surrounded by commas.

Tricks test-makers love:

- Slapping commas around essential info (trying to catch you slippin').
- Leaving commas off extra info.
- Piling on multiple clauses or adjectives to confuse your brain—classic flex move.
- When in doubt, bubble wrap, bubble wrap, bubble wrap!

Mini Comma Quiz 1 –Test Yourself (Non-Essentials) 📝

Q1 (ACT/SAT Style): Which is correct?

A. The P.E. teacher Ms. Kristen blows her whistle.
B. The P.E. teacher, Ms. Kristen blows her whistle.
C. The P.E. teacher, Ms. Kristen, blows her whistle.
D. The P.E. teacher Ms. Kristen, blows her whistle.

✅ **Correct Answer: C**
💬 Why? "Ms. Kristen" = extra info (renames "The P.E. teacher") → bubble-wrap it in commas.

Q2 (ACT/SAT Style): Which is correct?
A. The party which started at 7pm was epic.
B. The party, which started at 7pm, was epic.
C. The party which, started at 7pm, was epic.
D. The party, which started at 7pm was epic.

✅ **Correct Answer: B**
💬 Why? Which started at 7pm" is extra deets, not a make-or-break part of the sentence. Commas hug the clause like it's a friend you don't want to lose, keeping the main sentence lit. 🎉⏰

Q3 (ACT/SAT Style): ACT Trap: Which is punctuated correctly?

A. Students who are late, often miss the quiz.
B. Students, who are late often miss the quiz
C. Students who are late often miss the quiz.
D. Students, who are late, often miss the quiz.

✅ **Correct Answer: C**
💬 Why? "Who are late" = essential → tells us *which* students. No commas allowed. Test-makers love to toss random commas in here to make it look fancy—don't fall for it. 🕒📚

Q4 (ACT/SAT Style): SAT Sneaky Trap: Which is correct?

A. My friend, Alex is a wizard at video games.
B. My friend Alex is a wizard at video games.
C.My friend, Alex, is a wizard at video games.
D. Both B & C depending on context.

✅ **Correct Answer: D**
💬 Why? B ✓ if you have more than one friend → "Alex" is essential (identifies which friend). BUT C ✓ if you only have one friend (sorry 😅) → "Alex" is extra detail → wrap it in commas.

Q5 (ACT/SAT Style): SAT Twist: Which is correct?

A. My brother, who lives in Chicago, is visiting next week.
B. My brother who lives in Chicago is visiting next week.

✅ **Correct Answer: Depends!**
💬 Why? If I have **one brother total** → A ✓ (Chicago detail = extra info, non-essential) BUT If I have **multiple brothers** → B ✓ (Chicago info is essential to know *which* one)

These are quick wins —low effort, high-score potential. 💪

🎯 Commas Cheat Sheet – Commas in a Series (Lists)

ACT and SAT love to test lists. They want to see if you can line up items correctly—and yes, both tests obsess over the *Oxford comma* (the one before "and" in a list 🍕). Commas separate three or more items. Skip them only if there are just two. Basically, it's a "spot the squad" challenge: make sure every item gets its proper space, every adjective stays in line, and nobody gets left behind. 🔥💪

👑 **Easy Points Alert:** On ACT English, there's usually 5–10 questions per test about commas in lists. On SAT Writing & Language, you'll see around 3–6 questions. Series questions are often "low-hanging fruit"—easy points if you spot the squad members. 💪.

Rule 1. Comma Up Your Crew: Lists & Series

What it means: Each item in a list gets a comma if 3+ items. The last item always uses the Oxford comma (before "and"/"or"). Only 2 items? Skip the comma.

Quick test: Mentally yeet one item at a time.

✅ Sentence still works → commas belong.
❌ Sentence falls apart → hold off, no commas here.

- **The trap:** Test-makers love to sneak in a list with 2–3 items and leave out the last comma. (aka the Oxford comma)
- **Hack:** Always check: "Is there more than two items?" If yes → Oxford comma ALWAYS for SAT. For ACT, mostly yes BUT ensure other rules are followed before this one.
- **Cute tip:** Think of it as your squad's personal bodyguard—keeps the last item from getting smushed. 🍕💪

Example:

- Wrong: "I invited Tina, Mike and Lucy." → last two merge.
- Right: "I invited Tina, Mike, and Lucy." → safe, everyone chill. Oxford comma = gold.

Rule 2. Equal vs. Cumulative Adjectives

What it means: Test-makers love to throw adjectives into the mix to trick you. Know when a comma is describing a noun vs. when it separates items.

Quick test: **"Swap & see if it still slaps."** Swap works → comma it up. Swap breaks it → leave it.

✅ Swap works → equal adjectives → keep comma.

❌ Swap breaks → cumulative adjectives → no comma.

- **The trap:** Tests throw commas between adjectives that are **actually building on each other**.
- **Hack:** Swap 'em. Works = equal → comma ✅. Breaks = cumulative → no comma ❌.

- **Cute tip:** If adjectives fight when swapped, don't throw a comma—they're like roommates sharing a bed, gotta stick together.

Examples:

- Equal: *energetic, fearless kittens* → swap: *fearless, energetic kittens* ✓ comma needed
- Cumulative: *big red balloon* → swap: *red big balloon–nope, weird* ❌ no comma

Rule 3. Don't Mix Adjectives & Items

What it means: Keep adjectives describing the same noun separate from your list items. Don't accidentally split adjectives with commas meant for your squad list.

- **The trap:** They'll mash adjectives and list items in one sentence. Students confuse what's a "squad member" and what's a "description."
- **Hack:** Mentally separate the squads from the adjectives. Commas = separate equal adjectives or separate squad members.
- **Cute tip:** Think of it like a dance floor: adjectives dance together, list items dance solo.

Example:

- "…energetic, fearless kittens performing unicycle-riding, ballet, and hula hooping…" ✓
- Missing commas = chaotic mosh pit ❌

Rule of thumb: Commas separate true squad members OR equal adjectives. Only add commas if they're separate, equal "items" in a list.

Summary: Down & Dirty Version

💡 **Quick Mental Hack**

1. Read sentence aloud.
2. Spot adjectives → equal? comma.
3. Spot list → give every item its own comma + Oxford comma.
4. Swap adjectives → does sentence still work? ✅ Then comma belongs. ❌ Skip it.

Mini Comma Quiz 2 –Test Yourself (Series) 📝

Q1 (ACT/SAT Style): Oxford Comma Trap: What is correctly punctuated?

A. For breakfast, I had eggs, toast and juice.
B. For breakfast, I had eggs, toast, and juice.
C. For breakfast, I had eggs toast, and juice.
D. For breakfast, I had eggs toast and juice.

✅ **Correct Answer: B**
💬 Why? "Kick out anything without the Oxford comma (before "and"). Missing commas = unclear list

Q2 (ACT/SAT Style): Sneaky Adjectvies: Pick the correct sentence

A. She bought a shiny, red, sports car.
B. She bought a shiny red sports car.
C. She bought a shiny, red sports car.
D. She bought a shiny red, sports car.

✅ **Correct Answer: B**
💬 Why? Only use commas between adjectives that separately describe the noun ("shiny" + "red" are fine, but "sports car" is a single idea). So no breaking that phrase apart.

Q3 (ACT/SAT Style): Sneaky Double Action Trap: Which is correct?

A. He grabbed his phone, and checked his texts, and sighed.
B. He grabbed his phone, checked his texts, and sighed.
C. He grabbed his phone, checked his texts and, sighed.
D. He grabbed his phone checked his texts, and sighed.

✅ **Correct Answer: B**
💬 Why? One subject, three moves. A = too many "ands." C = fake comma. D = smushed start.

Q4 (ACT/SAT Style): Sneaky Phrases: Which is correct?

A. The club meets on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.
B. The club meets on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.
C. The club meets on Mondays, Wednesdays, and, Fridays.
D. The club meets on Mondays and, Wed. and Fridays.

✅ **Correct Answer: A**
💬 Why? Straight-up list of three days. C = extra comma after "and" (🚫 always illegal). D chops the rhythm like a bad remix.

Q5 (ACT/SAT Style): Long Phrase Fake Out: Which is correct?

A. He bought snacks like chips, cookies, the kind with sprinkles, and soda.
B. He bought snacks like chips, cookies the kind with sprinkles, and soda.
C. He bought snacks like chips cookies, the kind with sprinkles, and soda.
D. He bought snacks like, chips, cookies, the kind with sprinkles, and soda.

✅ **Correct Answer: A**
💬 Why? Squad check! First each snack gets its own seat at picnic table. "Cookies, the kind with sprinkles" is *one item with a bonus detail* → it stays inside the list. B drops a comma that signals the extra info. C smashes two items together. D misplaces the first comma so hard it looks like a typo.

Time to slay —grab these easy wins to boost your score! 💪

🎯 Modifier Cheat Sheet – Don't Let Them Bite You!

👑Easy Points Alert: Usually 10 ACT questions/6-10 SAT questions

ACT and SAT love to sneak in modifier traps. What's a modifier anyway?

- A modifier = word/phrase that gives extra info about something else in the sentence.
- Can be adjectives (bright) , adverbs (quickly) or clauses/phrases (running late).
- Signals: Look for words/phrases at the start of a sentence or before/after commas that describe something — that's probably a modifier!

ie : "Running late, the bus left without me."--- Ummm, who's running late? Not the bus… 😬 Hard nope.

Cute tip: Modifiers need a buddy noun! Imagine a modifier on a dance floor… dancing solo? Total chaos. Dancing with its BFF (the subject)? Smooth moves all night. 💃🕺

Types of SAT/ACT Traps

💥**Dangling Modifiers** = extra info chilling at the start of a sentence without a clear buddy noun. No BFF = chaos.

❌ "While studying, the TV was too loud." → Who's studying? Not the TV!

✅ "While studying, **I** noticed the TV was too loud."

- **Hack:** Ask–*WHO or WHAT is this extra info about?* Move that modifier right next to that word–BFFs only!
- Be aware: Always check the subject: if it is missing, add it!

📍 **Misplaced Modifiers** = a word or phrase hanging out too far from the thing it's describing. Big oops = wrong meaning. Modifiers are clingy. They ONLY belong next to their BFF.

❌ "She almost drove her kids to school every day." → Almost drove what?

✅ "She drove her kids to school almost every day."

- **Hack:** Slide that modifier right next to the word it needs to describe. Read it aloud–if it sounds weird, the modifier is misplaced

⚖️**Comparison Confusion** – A comparison modifier = extra info that *messes up who's being compared to who.* SAT loves to sneak these in to confuse you.

❌ "Maria scored higher than the student who studied the least." → Wait… higher than who exactly? 😳

✅ "Maria scored higher than any student in her class who studied the least."

- **Hack:** Make sure the modifier clearly points to the right person or thing. Double-check that the "better/worse/more/less" is obvious.

- Look for:
    1) Degree/ranking → higher, lower, better, worse, older, younger
    2) Quantity/amount → more, less, most, least)
    3) Relative measure →faster, slower, stronger, weaker)-

⚠️ Spot it early: misplaced comparisons = unclear or silly sentences.

🏋️ **Too Many Modifiers Crammed** – Piling way too many adjectives or phrases into a sentence = meaning lost. Keep it clean, keep it clear.

❌ “She wore a bright, shiny, sparkly, rainbow-colored, glittery dress.” → Whoa, brain overload!

✅ “She wore a bright, glittery, rainbow-colored dress.”

- **Hack:** Break modifiers into manageable chunks.Keep each modifier attached to the word it describes. Dump the fluff.
- Remember: Modifiers are like dancers on a squad–each has a spot. Overcrowded dance floor=chaos.

Summary: Down & Dirty Version

💡 Quick Mental Hack

1. **Read aloud:** sounds weird = modifier trap
2. **Find extra info:** adjectives, adverbs, phrases
3. **Ask:** Who/what is this describing? → BFF noun
4. **Check comparisons:** more, less, better, worse, older, faster
5. **Trim or split:** too many modifiers = chaos
6. **Swap test:** move it; meaning changes? Wrong spot!

Mini Modifier Quiz –Test Yourself 

Q1 (ACT/SAT Style): Dangling Modifiers: What sentence is correct?

A. Running to catch the bus, my backpack fell off.
B. Running to catch the bus, I dropped my backpack.
C. My backpack fell off, running to catch the bus.
D. Running to catch the bus my backpack fell off.

✅ Correct Answer: B
💬 Why? Dangling modifier alert! "Running to catch the bus" needs a buddy noun — "I" is the one running. A and D make the backpack the runner. C smushes the clause at the wrong spot.

Q2 (SAT/ACT Style): Misplaced Modifiers – Pick the sentence that makes sense.
A. She almost ate all the cookies in one sitting.
B. She ate almost all the cookies in one sitting.
C. Almost she ate all the cookies in one sitting.
D. She ate all almost the cookies in one sitting.

✅ Correct Answer: B
💬 Why? "Almost" modifies all the cookies, not "ate." A misplaces it, making it sound like she nearly ate but didn't. C & D = awkward or grammatically wrong.

Q3 (SAT/ACT Style): Comparison Confusion – Which is correct?
A. Jenna scored higher than her friend who studied the least.
B. Jenna scored higher than any friend in her class who studied the least.
C. Jenna scored higher than her friend, who studied the least.
D. Jenna scored higher than her friend who studied least.

✅ Correct Answer: B
💬 Why? Modifiers must clearly point to the right person. "Any friend in her class…" makes the comparison clear. A & D are vague; C changes meaning with the comma.

Q4 (SAT/ACT Style): Too Many Modifiers – Which sentence is clean and correct?
A. She wore a bright, sparkly, shiny, multicolored, glittery dress.
B. She wore a bright, shiny, multicolored dress.
C. She wore a bright shiny, sparkly multicolored glittery dress.
D. She wore bright shiny multicolored glittery dress.

✅ Correct Answer: B
💬 Why? Overstuffed modifiers = confusing. Trim the extra adjectives and keep each modifier clearly attached to the noun.

Q5 (SAT/ACT Style): Sneaky Modifier Placement – Pick the right one.
A. While reading the book, the lights were too dim.
B. The lights were too dim while reading the book.
C. While reading the book, I noticed the lights were too dim.
D. While reading, the book lights were too dim.

✅ Correct Answer: C
💬 Why? Dangling alert! The person reading = "I." A & D make the lights read the book. B = confusing

💪 **Time to slay those modifiers! Spot, fix, and boost your score with these easy wins.**