



BLOOMSBURY INTERNATIONAL

English Grammar

Comma punctuation, compound adjectives, comparatives, superlatives, English writing tips, and a punctuation quiz.



English Punctuation Rules with Examples: the Comma.

This week's topic is about English Punctuation rules. [The Oxford English Dictionary](#) defines punctuation as "The marks, such as full stop, comma, and brackets, used in writing to separate sentences and their elements and to clarify meaning." They are also used to define pauses in sentences where one might need to catch one's breath, used to emphasise certain words in a sentence, separate blocks of sentences or clauses, help us distinguish between important information and additional information in a text avoid ambiguity.



This is all well and good, but actually, using commas accurately is one of the key elements to avoid misunderstandings.

A prime example of this is:

Let's eat, grandpa!

Now try it without the comma. I'm not really sure

how tasty grandpa would be!

How to Use English Commas

The comma can be used:

To separate lists:

Listing commas are used in sentences to avoid repeating the conjunctions *and/or*, or separate a list of adjectives or nouns.

E.g.: I enjoy reading newspapers, magazines and books.

After work she had a large, hot, tasty bowl of soup.

- **To separate actions:**

Just like listing commas, joining commas are used to separate a sequence of actions:

E.g.: The Prime Minister walked into the room, sat down, looked around the room and smiled.

Joining commas can also join two clauses which usually contain a subject and a verb, and are often connected by conjunctions such as **and**, **but** and **while**.



E.g.: I wanted to go to Madame Tussaud's, but he didn't.

Watchmen and ruined mannequins of explorers at Madame Tassaud's

You might now be asking yourself if the comma is necessary in the sentence. The answer is no, as the main clause is short and does not cause ambiguity. However, if the main clause were longer, then I would suggest you put a comma.

E.g.: I wanted take Susan's youngest son Joseph to [Madame Tussaud's](#) the other day, but he'd made other plans.

- **With addresses and numbers:**

In addresses we separate the street address, the city and the county with a comma.

E.g.: 204 Mayflower Road, Poole, Dorset.

With numbers, we use commas, not full stops, to separate the thousands from the hundreds. E.g.: 672,948

- **In relative clauses using "which":**

When two clauses are joined to form a single sentence, and one of the clauses adds extra information that can be removed without causing ambiguity, then we add commas.

Eg: Django, which was directed by Quentin Tarantino, is an extraordinary film.

These types of sentences are called non-defining relative clauses.

- **Isolating commas**

Another way of isolating clauses or sections of the sentence (a clause, a phrase or a single word) that are not essential, is to use commas. There are different types of isolated sentences:

- With discourse markers: Fortunately, he arrived on time.
- With linkers and connectors: I enjoyed the film. However, Tom Hanks wasn't that good.

I think, nevertheless, that buying a flat in London is a good idea.

- **To emphasise:** He is late, as usual.
- **When pausing**

We can use commas to reflect when a natural pause might appear in spoken English.

Eg: The other day, [pause] while I was walking in the park, [pause] I saw Madonna jogging with her daughter.

- **To avoid repetition**

In English, when we want to avoid repetition, we often elide some words and use commas:

E.g.: I work as a teacher and my husband, (works) in finance

I ordered a sandwich, my sister a salad.

- **The Oxford comma**

This is an optional comma that can be placed in front of the word “and” at the end of a list.

Eg.: The Post was written by Elizabeth Hannah, directed by Stephen Spielberg, and stars Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks.

How to test your knowledge of English Grammar

Test your knowledge of English grammar by reading, writing, and speaking English in contexts of areas where English is the primary method of communication.

What are Compound Adjectives?

Well, a compound is when two things are joined together to make a greater unit. Normal adjectives are simply words that describe things so, for example, when we say something is nice, horrible, expensive, cheap, hot, cold,

delicious, and so forth that is an adjective. So compound adjectives are slightly different in that they consist of two words.



One of the most famous examples of a compound adjective is good looking. It consists of two separate words i.e. “good” and “looking” but has one meaning: someone who has an attractive appearance. Compound adjectives are often hyphenated; a hyphen is a line separating two words that together make a compound adjective.

English is replete with compound adjectives and they enrich this language.

Examples include the following:



“mouth-watering”

This means something is so delicious that it makes your mouth salivate at the prospect of eating it. It can also be applied to things other than food. For example in sport, television commentators may speak of a “mouth-watering” prospect of two great teams playing in a match which will

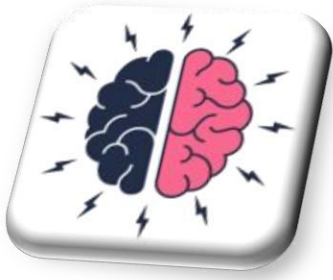
enthral spectators.

“nail-biting”

This means when something makes us nervous or fills us with suspense that we literally bite our nails as some people do at times when they are extremely excited and nervous. As with the previous example of “mouth-watering” it can be used in a sports context amongst others.



“thought-provoking”



When something, for example a book or a film, stimulates us into thinking or pondering deeper over a subject, then that very thing can be said to be thought-provoking.

Compound adjectives are often used to shorten sentences and can be seen in newspaper and magazine articles.

Let’s look at the following example:

“Arnold Schwarzenegger was born in Austria and is an actor who is famous all over the world that lives in California which is in the USA- a country where the English language is spoken”.

Now let’s replace it with compound adjectives.

“World-famous, Austrian-born, California-based actor Arnold Schwarzenegger lives in the English-speaking USA”.

We have reduced the word count from **34 words** in the first example to 11 in the second. This can be quite useful when a journalist has to fit his article into a specific allocated number of words or sentences in a magazine or an editor has to try and fit it in appropriately to other articles on a page by shortening it.

Compound adjectives and other compounds such as compound nouns (nouns made of two words e.g. driving license, identity card) are a feature of the English language and one of its significant qualities distinguishing it from other languages.

- Check our [idiom](#) of the Week every Wednesday to help broaden your knowledge of
- Read our bi-weekly [blog](#) which includes study tips, interesting aspects of the English language, worldwide facts and much more!
- Read what our [students](#) have to say about studying at Bloomsbury International and life in London.

Understanding Comparatives and Superlatives

One of the first things you'll learn when studying English is that adjectives are words used to describe people, places or objects. In very simple terms, this means that when you read or hear a phrase such as "the big cow," the word "big" is used as an adjective to describe the cow. Hopefully this is relatively simple for most learners of English to master. Today we're going to talk about comparatives and superlatives.

Adjectives can also come in very useful when comparing two or more things, as they can be changed to 'comparative' or 'superlative' form.



Comparative adjectives

These are used to compare differences between the objects they modify. The general form of a sentence using a comparative adjective is:

Subject (noun) + verb +

comparative adjective + than + object (noun).

For example, "This cow is bigger than that sheep."

Superlative adjectives

These are used to describe an object at the upper or lower limit of a certain quality, and are used in sentences where a subject is compared to a group of objects. The sentence structure follows this pattern:

Subject (noun) + verb + the + superlative adjective + object (noun).

For example, "The cow was the biggest of all the cows in the field."

Making the comparative or superlative form of adjectives



This can be a little tricky to master, as the rules for creating a comparative or superlative form of an adjective depend on how many syllables the word you're changing has, and how it is spelt. Unsurprisingly, there are also various exceptions to the rules and some irregular

adjectives that follow no rules at all! However, this should help you master some of the principles:

One-syllable adjectives: these are the easiest to change. Simply add “er” to make the comparative form and “est” to make the superlative.

For example: clean becomes cleaner or cleanest.

Now here come the exceptions which depend on the spelling of the adjective:

If the adjective ends in one vowel and one consonant, the consonant is often doubled.

For example: wet becomes wetter or wettest.

If the adjective ends in “y”, this usually changes to “i”.

For example: dry becomes drier or driest

If the adjective ends in “e”, don’t add another “e”.

For example: large becomes larger or largest.

The one-syllable exceptions: some one-syllable adjectives don’t follow the rules at all! For example, you can’t add “er” or “est” to the following words:

- fun – instead you say “more fun” or “most fun”
- real – instead you say “more real” or “most real”
- right – “more right” or “most right”
- wrong – “more wrong” or “most wrong”

Two-syllable adjectives: generally, we use “more” or “most” to make these into comparatives and superlatives.

For example: careful becomes “more careful” or “most careful”.

However, this being the English language, there are of course some exceptions! Generally these need to be learned individually.

For example: clever can become cleverer or cleverest. Other exceptions include narrow, quiet and simple, which can also be changed to comparatives and superlatives using “er” and “est”.

For example: happy can become happier or happiest (note that while this is another exception, the rule about changing the “y” to “i” we outlined above still applies).

Adjectives with more than two syllables: the only way of turning an adjective with three or more syllables into a comparative or superlative is to use “more” or “most”.

For example: beautiful becomes “more beautiful” or “most beautiful”.

Irregular adjectives: there are also some adjectives that don’t follow any of these rules! They just need to be learned individually. These are some of the main examples of irregular adjectives:

- good becomes better or best
- bad becomes worse or worst
- far becomes further or furthers
- much becomes more or most
- little becomes less or least.

Ways to improve your English writing skills

If you fall into any of these common traps, or perhaps have a tendency to make other common mistakes, you’re not alone. However, there are certain things you can do to help yourself to improve your English writing skills and gain confidence in your ability to produce a high standard of writing, such as:

- read lots of well-written English: whether you buy a newspaper every day, read English literature or something else, the more you read good English, the more you’ll absorb about how to write well.
- always check your writing: if you’re submitting an essay or assignment, always take time to read through it and check for any mistakes you might have made. If you tend to make the same kinds of mistakes, why not print out a checklist of things to check your English writing for?
- focus on one mistake at a time: if you’ve made a lot of errors, it can be easy to focus on the negatives and find it difficult to work out how to change your work. You can help yourself by looking at one mistake at a time. Change one, then move onto the next in a methodical way.
- ask someone else to check your work: ask someone whose English [writing skills](#) are better than yours to read your work, point out any mistakes you’ve made, and discuss them with you. Two heads are always better than one!

Have Fun with English

English punctuation

Fill the gap with a comma or commas, a semicolon (;) or a colon (:)

1. This is my uncle Tom he used to live in London but he moved to Sydney last year.
2. Sally his daughter cleaned the kitchen from top to bottom.
3. I went to the cinema last night however, I didn't like the film.
4. I've had many jobs teaching, administration, singing and marketing.
5. Most cakes contain flour egg and sugar.
6. To make tea add a teabag to the cup and then pour in hot water.
7. The trees were covered in snow this morning it was so beautiful to see.
8. If you want to achieve happiness try to be optimistic every day.
9. The Union Jack flag has 3 colours red, white and blue.
10. You may be asked for your personal details: age gender nationality etc.

Answers

1. This is my uncle Tom; he used to live in London but he moved to Sydney last year.
2. Sally, his daughter, cleaned the kitchen from top to bottom.
3. I went to the cinema last night; however, I didn't like the film.
4. I've had many jobs: teaching, administration, singing and marketing.
5. Most cakes contain flour, egg, and sugar.
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