

## Independent Clauses

**11g.** Use a comma before *and*, *but*, *for*, *nor*, *or*, *so*, or *yet* when it joins independent clauses.

- EXAMPLES** Hector pressed the button, **and** the engine started up.
- She would never argue, **nor** would she complain to anyone.
- Are you going to the football game, **or** do you have other plans for Saturday?
- He is an accomplished actor, **yet** he's very modest.

Do not be misled by compound verbs, which can make a sentence look like a compound sentence.

**SIMPLE SENTENCE** Mara **cleared** the table and **did** the dishes.  
[one subject with a compound verb]

**COMPOUND SENTENCE** **Mara cleared the table**, and **Roland did the dishes**. [two independent clauses]

**NOTE** The comma joining two independent clauses is sometimes omitted before *and*, *but*, *or*, or *nor* when the independent clauses are very short and when there is no possibility of misunderstanding.

**CLEAR** The dog barked and the cat meowed.

**AWKWARD** Bill bathed the dog and the cat hid under the bed.  
[confusing without comma]

**CLEAR** Bill bathed the dog, and the cat hid under the bed.

### Exercise 5 Correcting Sentences by Adding Commas Between Independent Clauses

Where a comma should be used, write the word preceding the comma, the comma, and the conjunction following it. If a sentence is already correct, write C.

- EXAMPLE** 1. Accident-related injuries are common and many of these injuries can be prevented.
1. *common, and*
1. It is important to know first aid for an accident can happen at almost any time.
2. More than 83,000 people in the United States die in accidents each year and many millions are injured.

#### Reference Note

For more about **compound sentences**, see page 155. For information on **compound subjects** and **compound verbs**, see page 98.

#### Think as a Reader/Writer

For clarity, some writers prefer always to use the comma before a conjunction joining independent clauses. Follow your teacher's instructions on this point.

#### SKILLS FOCUS

Use commas correctly in compound sentences.

**Reference Note**

For more information about **subordinate clauses**, see page 145. For more about **participial phrases**, see page 125.

**SKILLS FOCUS**

Use commas correctly to set off nonessential clauses and nonessential phrases.

3. Many household products can cause illness or even death but are often stored where small children can reach them.
4. Biking accidents are common wherever cars and bicycles use the same road so many communities have provided bicycle lanes.
5. Car accidents are the leading cause of childhood fatalities but seat belts have saved many lives.
6. Everyone should know what to do in case of fire and different escape routes should be tested.
7. If you need to escape a fire, you should stay close to the floor and be very cautious about opening doors.
8. Holding your breath, keep low and protected behind a door when opening it for a blast of superheated air can be fatal.
9. An injured person should not get up nor should liquid be given to someone who is unconscious.
10. Always have someone with you when you swim or you may find yourself without help when you need it.

## Nonessential Clauses and Phrases

### 11h. Use commas to set off nonessential subordinate clauses and nonessential participial phrases.

A **nonessential** (or **nonrestrictive**) clause or participial phrase adds information that is not necessary to the main idea in the sentence.

**NONESSENTIAL CLAUSES** Eileen Murray, **who is at the top of her class**, wants to go to medical school.  
Texas, **which has the most farms of any state in this country**, produces one fourth of our oil.

**NONESSENTIAL PHRASES** Tim Ricardo, **hoping to make the swim team**, practiced every day.  
*The Lord of the Rings*, **written by J.R.R. Tolkien**, has been translated into many languages.

Omitting each boldface clause or phrase in the preceding examples does not change the main idea of the sentence.

**EXAMPLES** Eileen Murray wants to go to medical school.

Texas produces one fourth of our oil.

Tim Ricardo practiced every day.

*The Lord of the Rings* has been translated into many languages.

When a clause or phrase is necessary to the meaning of a sentence—that is, when it tells *which one(s)*—the clause or phrase is **essential** (or **restrictive**), and commas are not used.

Notice how the meaning of each of the following sentences changes when the essential clause or phrase is omitted.

**ESSENTIAL CLAUSE** All students **whose names are on that list** must report to Ms. Washington this afternoon. [All students must report to Ms. Washington this afternoon.]

**ESSENTIAL PHRASE** A Ming vase **displayed in the museum** was once owned by Chiang Kai-shek. [A Ming vase was once owned by Chiang Kai-shek.]

Depending on the writer's meaning, a participial phrase or clause may be either essential or non-essential. Including or omitting commas tells the reader how the clause or phrase relates to the main idea of the sentence.

**NONESSENTIAL CLAUSE** LaWanda's brother, who is a senior, works part time at the mall. [LaWanda has only one brother. He works at the mall.]

**ESSENTIAL CLAUSE** LaWanda's brother who is a senior works part time at the mall. [LaWanda has more than one brother. The one who is a senior works at the mall.]

**NOTE** An adjective clause beginning with *that* is usually essential.

**EXAMPLE** Was Hank Aaron the first major league baseball player **that** broke Babe Ruth's home run record?

## Exercise 6 Correcting Sentences with Essential and Nonessential Clauses by Adding or Deleting Commas

The following sentences contain essential and nonessential clauses. Add or delete commas as necessary to punctuate each of these clauses correctly. If a sentence is already correct, write *C*.

**EXAMPLE** 1. My mother who is a Celtics fan has season tickets.  
1. *My mother, who is a Celtics fan, has season tickets.*



© 1998 by Sidney Harris.

1. *Jump Start* which is my favorite comic strip makes me think as well as laugh.
2. Ms. Lopez, who teaches social studies and gym will leave at the end of the year.
3. The amusement rides that are the most exciting may be the most dangerous.
4. Many of the first Spanish settlements in California were founded by Father Junípero Serra who liked to take long walks between them.
5. People, who carry credit cards, should keep a record of their account numbers at home.
6. Amy Kwan who is our class president plans to go to Yale after she graduates from high school.
7. A town like Cottonwood which has a population of five thousand seems ideal to me.
8. All dogs that pass the obedience test get a reward; those that don't pass get to take the test again later.
9. Have you tried this pemmican which my mother made from an old Cree recipe?
10. "The Gift of the Magi" is a story, in which the two main characters who are deeply in love make sacrifices in order to buy gifts for each other.

### Exercise 7 Correcting Sentences with Participial Phrases by Adding or Deleting Commas

Add or delete commas as necessary to punctuate the following sentences correctly. If a sentence is already correctly punctuated, write C.

- EXAMPLE**
1. Our dog startled by the noise began to bark.  
1. *Our dog, startled by the noise, began to bark.*
  1. People, visiting the reservation, will be barred from burial sites, which are considered holy by American Indians.
  2. Players breaking training will be dismissed from the team.
  3. Students, planning to go on the field trip, should bring their lunches.
  4. When Tony holding up a parsnip asked whether parsnips are related to carrots, I said, "Well, they certainly look alike."
  5. Joe told me that kudzu introduced into the United States in the 1800s now grows in much of the South.
  6. Elizabeth Blackwell completing her medical studies in 1849 became the first female doctor in the United States.