

The **Chicago** Manual of Style

16

SIXTEENTH EDITION

The Essential Guide for
Writers, Editors, and Publishers

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London
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First edition published 1906. Sixteenth edition 2010.
Printed in the United States of America

18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-10420-1 (cloth)
ISBN-10: 0-226-10420-6 (cloth)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The Chicago manual of style.—16th ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-10420-1 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-226-10420-6 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Printing—Style manuals.

2. Authorship—Style manuals.

Z253.U69 2010

808'.027'0973—dc22

2009053612

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(Permanence of Paper).



comma is required if the phrase or sentence continues beyond the element being set off. This principle applies to many of the uses for commas described in this section. An exception is made for commas within the title of a work (third example).

June 5, 1928, lives on in the memories of only a handful of us.

Sledding in Duluth, Minnesota, is facilitated by that city's hills and frigid winters.
but

Look Homeward, Angel was not the working title of the manuscript.

Series and the Serial Comma

- 6.18** *Serial commas.* Items in a series are normally separated by commas (but see 6.58). When a conjunction joins the last two elements in a series of three or more, a comma—known as the serial or series comma or the Oxford comma—should appear before the conjunction. Chicago strongly recommends this widely practiced usage, blessed by Fowler and other authorities (see bibliog. 1.2), since it prevents ambiguity. If the last element consists of a pair joined by *and*, the pair should still be preceded by a serial comma and the first *and* (see the last two examples below).

She took a photograph of her parents, the president, and the vice president.
Before heading out the door, she took note of the typical outlines of sweet gum,
ginkgo, and elm leaves.

I want no ifs, ands, or buts.

Paul put the kettle on, Don fetched the teapot, and I made tea.

Their wartime rations included cabbage, turnips, and bread and butter.

John was singing, Jean was playing guitar, and Alan was running errands and
furnishing food.

Note that the phrase *as well as* is not equivalent to *and*.

The team fielded one Mazda, two Corvettes, and three Bugattis, as well as a battered Plymouth Belvedere.

not

The team fielded one Mazda, two Corvettes, three Bugattis, as well as a battered Plymouth Belvedere.

In a series whose elements are all joined by conjunctions, no commas are needed unless the elements are long and delimiters would be helpful.

Would you prefer Mendelssohn or Schumann or Liszt?

You can turn left at the second fountain and right when you reach the temple, or turn left at the third fountain and left again at the statue of Venus, or just ask a local person how to get there.

6.19 *Using semicolons instead of commas in a series.* When elements in a series include internal punctuation, or when they are very long and complex, they may need to be separated by semicolons rather than by commas (see 6.58). For a simple list, however—even if it is introduced with a colon—commas are preferred.

6.20 *Commas with “etc.” and “et al.”* Traditional use dictates that the abbreviation *etc.* (*et cetera*, literally “and others of the same kind”) is preceded and (unless it ends a sentence) followed by a comma when it is the final item in a series. Such equivalents as *and so forth* and *and the like* are usually treated the same way. (In formal prose, *etc.* should be avoided, though it is usually acceptable in lists and tables, in notes, and within parentheses.) See also 5.220 under *etc.*

Proper technique (with attention paid to posture, wrist position, distance from the keyboard, etc., in the later performances) is not in and of itself sufficient to explain Rubinstein's endurance.

The philosopher's population studies, classic textbooks, stray notes, and so forth, were found in the attic.

The abbreviation *et al.* (*et alia* [neut.], *et alii* [masc.], or *et aliae* [fem.], literally “and others”), whether used in regular text or (more often) in bibliographical references, should be treated like *etc.* If *et al.* follows a single item, however (e.g., “Jones et al.”), it requires no preceding or following comma. Note that neither *etc.* nor *et al.* is italicized in normal prose (see the first example above).

6.21 *Omitting serial commas before ampersands.* When an ampersand is used instead of the word *and* (as in company names), the serial comma is omitted.

Winken, Blinken & Nod is a purveyor of nightwear.

Commas with Relative Clauses

6.22 *Restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses—“which” versus “that.”* A relative clause is said to be restrictive if it provides information that is essential

to the meaning of the sentence. Restrictive relative clauses are usually introduced by *that* (or *who/whom/whose*) and are never set off by commas from the rest of the sentence. The pronoun *that* may occasionally be omitted (but need not be) if the sentence is just as clear without it, as in the second example (before "I").

The version of the manuscript that the editors submitted to the publisher was well formatted.

The book I have just finished is due back tomorrow; the others can wait.

I prefer to share the road with drivers who focus on the road rather than on what they happen to be reading.

A relative clause is said to be nonrestrictive if it could be omitted without obscuring the identity of the noun to which it refers or otherwise changing the meaning of the rest of the sentence. Nonrestrictive relative clauses are usually introduced by *which* (or *who/whom/whose*) and are set off from the rest of the sentence by commas.

The final manuscript, which was well formatted, was submitted to the publisher on time.

Ulysses, which I finished early this morning, is due back on June 16.

I prefer to share the road with illiterate drivers, who are unlikely to read books while driving.

Although *which* can be substituted for *that* in a restrictive clause (a common practice in British English), many writers preserve the distinction between restrictive *that* (with no commas) and nonrestrictive *which* (with commas). See also 5.220 under *that; which*.

Commas with Appositives

- 6.23** *Restrictive and nonrestrictive appositives.* A word, abbreviation, phrase, or clause that is in apposition to a noun (i.e., provides an explanatory equivalent) is normally set off by commas if it is nonrestrictive—that is, if it can be omitted without obscuring the identity of the noun to which it refers.

K. Lester's only collection of poems, *An Apocryphal Miscellany*, first appeared as a series of mimeographs.

This year's poet laureate, K. Lester, spoke first.

Ursula's husband, Jan, is also a writer.

Ursula's son, Clifford, had been a student of Norman Maclean's. (Ursula has only one son.)

If, however, the word or phrase is restrictive—that is, provides essential information about the noun (or nouns) to which it refers—no commas should appear.

O'Neill's play *The Hairy Ape* was being revived. (O'Neill wrote a number of plays.)
The renowned poet and historian K. Lester scheduled a six-city tour for April.
Caligula's sister Drusilla has been the subject of much speculation. (Caligula had more than one sister.)

See also 5.21.

Commas with Parenthetical and Descriptive Phrases

- 6.24** *Commas with parenthetical elements.* If only a slight break is intended, commas should be used to set off a parenthetical element inserted into a sentence as an explanation or comment. If a stronger break is needed or if there are commas within the parenthetical element, em dashes (6.82) or parentheses (6.92) should be used.

All the test participants, in spite of our initial fears, recovered.
The Hooligan Report was, to say the least, a bombshell.
The most provocative, if not the most important, part of the statement came last.
Most children fail to consider the history behind new technologies, if they think of it at all.

- 6.25** *Commas with "however," "therefore," "indeed," and so forth.* Commas—sometimes paired with semicolons (see 6.55)—are traditionally used to set off adverbs such as *however*, *therefore*, and *indeed*. When the adverb is essential to the meaning of the clause, or if no pause is intended or desired, commas are not needed (as in the last two examples).

A truly efficient gasoline-powered engine remains, however, a pipe dream.
Indeed, not one test subject accurately predicted the amount of soup in the bowl.
but
If you cheat and are therefore disqualified, you may also risk losing your scholarship.
That was indeed the outcome of the study.