



## PUTTING COMMAS IN THEIR PLACE

## Curtain Raisers

### *Introductory clauses & phrases*

PHRASES and DEPENDENT CLAUSES that come at the beginning of a sentence are generally separated from the main clause by a COMMA.



#### EXAMPLES

If at first you don't succeed, you should try and try again.

When in doubt, punt.

On hearing this news, Agamemnon fell into a great rage.

In his grief and bitter fury, Achilles prayed to Zeus for a Trojan victory.

When Galileo was nine years old, he was sent to be educated in Florence.

#### OPTIONAL: SHORT PHRASES RELATING TO TIME OR PLACE

When the introductory material consists of a *short phrase relating to time or place*, the comma may be omitted—i.e., it's optional. A few examples:

On Tuesday we received news of her arrival. [comma optional]

In France everyone is left-handed. [comma optional]

In 2002 we introduced our first left-handed drill. [comma optional]

Once upon a time, we introduced the world's first left-handed drill. [comma optional]

#### **But:**

In 2002, when we introduced our first left-handed drill, [comma required—*when we introduced our...* is parenthetical]  
we had no competition.

#### KEY POINT

The failure to insert a COMMA between an INTRODUCTORY DEPENDENT CLAUSE and the MAIN CLAUSE can be a source of confusion to your readers.

Examine the following sentences:

Whenever I call your mother a nasty girl gets on the line.

If they lose this game will be their last for the season.

#### AT A GLANCE

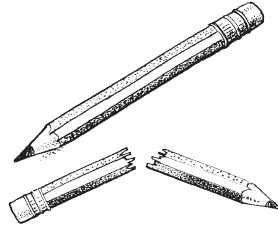
Short PHRASES relating to time or place do *not* have to be separated from the main clause by a COMMA.

## CURTAIN RAISERS

**Exercise**

*Directions:* In each of the following sentences, 1) underline the main clause; 2) decide whether a COMMA is needed after the INTRODUCTORY CLAUSE OR PHRASE.

1. Due to unforeseen circumstances we have to cancel this week's meeting.
2. Whenever you want to see me just put your lips together and blow.
3. In January we'll have a better idea of where we're going.
4. As we agreed I am sending you a booklet that describes our line of left-handed tools.
5. When Agamemnon woke and saw the gray dawn light he remembered his dream and was great with hope.
6. For the first time in all the long years of the siege the two great war hosts came face to face.
7. In the open space between the two armies a rough altar had been set up.
8. That evening Hector spoke to his brother.
9. So company by company following their kings and chiefs and captains the Greeks swept out over the plain in a great wheeling mass of chariots.
10. After we finish eating the dishes will have to be done.
11. Whenever I lose the baby thinks it's hilarious.
12. When it's my turn to close the store is always busy.

**TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS**

You can also begin sentences with any number of “transitional expressions”—*Consequently... Of course... As a result...* — Such expressions must be separated from the main clause with a COMMA:

Accordingly, we must add a number of new subjects to our curriculum.

Of course, that depends on the size of the bubble gum harvest.

On the contrary, we can meet on Friday.

Notice that the category TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS is a broad category that includes what we earlier called CONJUNCTIVE ADVERBS — like *furthermore, indeed, however, nevertheless*, and so forth.

**COMMON TRANSITIONAL WORDS & PHRASES**

well	indeed
therefore	of course
however	as a result
for example	in fact
consequently	as usual
unfortunately	on the contrary
accordingly	furthermore
what's more	in addition
that is	in conclusion