



## GRAMMAR GROWLS WITH THE GRAMMAR OWL – COMMAS, Part 2



The Owl and I are taking a second look at commas in this PDF. I should say that part one and part two will still not be an exhaustive study of the use and misuse of commas, although some may find it exhausting. 😊 However, Owl and I have tried to cover some of the main points of comma usage in these two posts.

Here, then, are a few more places where commas should be used. As in part one, I have highlighted the commas that pertain to the rule in red.

1. Commas separate introductory phrases from the rest of the sentence. As usual, Beth couldn't remember who wanted tea and who wanted lemonade.
2. Commas can completely change the meaning of a sentence, so use them carefully. Beth thought Lizzie could drink more lemonade than anyone else in the room. But is that what you really want to say? Punctuate it differently, and you have a very different sentence. Beth, thought Lizzie, could drink more lemonade than anyone else in the room.
3. Commas set off appositives in sentences. (Whoa, Beth – what's an appositive? It's a synonym, or descriptor, that gives you more information about the word it is explaining. And before you ask, no, there is no corresponding antonym. 😊 ) I've underlined the appositives in the two examples, as well as highlighting the pertinent commas. Many half-empty glasses of lemonade, a particularly tart beverage, sat on the counter. The Abyssinian, a breed of cat, eyed the guests malevolently.
4. Commas are used before clauses beginning with "which." Beth had created a new recipe for turnip cake, which was a resounding failure.

Be aware that there are also places where commas should NOT be used.

5. Commas are NOT used before clauses beginning with “that.” The same sentence from the “which” example above, if rendered with “that,” does not receive a comma. Beth had created a new recipe for turnip cake that was a resounding failure.

6. Commas do NOT need to separate conjunctions from the clause that follows them. You may have been taught differently, but it is not necessary to do this. Many people would have put a comma after “but” in that sentence. That’s not necessary.

7. Commas are NOT used every time you would pause or take a breath when reading aloud. This is a very common error. Often as one writes, it seems natural to insert a comma, every time there seems to be a pause in the sentence. This is not necessary, nor is the comma after “comma” in the example.

8. Commas are NOT used to separate two independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction. If the two clauses look as though they should be separate sentences, they should be written as such. Otherwise, you are committing a “comma splice.” The turnip cake was one of Beth’s experiments, it would have been better if she had left the carrot cake recipe alone. It would also have been better if she had punctuated that as two separate sentences. The turnip cake was one of Beth’s experiments. It would have been better if she had left the carrot cake recipe alone.

Once again, the Owl and I have given you a rule for each of the Owl’s talons. We hope this has helped you get a better grip on comma use.

Just in case you’re wondering, I make very good lemonade, from my grandmother’s recipe, and I have never attempted to make or serve turnip cake. For all I know, turnip cake could well be good!