

The Five Comma Rules That Rule the World

1. Use a comma after an introductory phrase or clause.

According to Wilbur, good friends who write well are not easy to find.

2. Use commas before and after a parenthetical phrase or clause.

Wilbur, E. B. White's famous pig, laments that it is difficult to find a good friend who writes well.

3. Use a comma to separate two independent clauses linked by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet).

Charlotte promises Wilbur she will save his life, and she ponders long and hard how to do so.

4. Use a comma to separate items in a series.

The other animals in the farmyard, the rat, the geese, and the sheep, are amazed at Charlotte's masterful plan to save Wilbur.

5. Use a comma before a quotation when an introductory phrase with a word like *say* or *reply* precedes the quotation.*

Wilbur says, "It's not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer" (White 184).

Thanks to Julie-Francoise Kruidenier '02 for the above insights.

*For more on the punctuation of quotations, see "*Quotations*," available at the Writing Center and on the Writing Center website.

Works Cited

White, E.B. Charlotte's Web. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980.