**Commas**

Commas can have many different uses. Two of their main uses are

1) To separate items in a list:

*You will need pencils, paper, a ruler, rubber and compass.*

*Goliath walked down the hill, over the stream, up the pebbly bank and stood on a great boulder.*

2) To separate direct speech from the words which introduce or follow it:

*Peter said, “Give me back my ball.”*

*“Not until you give me back my jumper,” said James.*

**Activity 1**

The following sentences have missing commas. Write out the sentences, putting in the commas where they belong.

1. I liked Miss Watkins. She was patient intelligent generous and interesting.
2. Major Collins was boring mean arrogant and unkind.
3. I opened the door and Richard said “Did you get my message?”
4. “If you had let me know earlier it would have been better” I replied.
5. “I did try to phone you” Richard explained “but there was no answer.”
6. “Well” I said “now you are here I hope you have brought the rolls for the hotdogs sausages all of the different sauces and burgers for the barbecue.

You should also use commas to separate different parts of a sentence:

1. To separate subordinate clauses (extra information) when they come before the main clause:

*Purring contentedly, the cat sat on the mat.*

*While John was rowing across the lake, the boat sprang a leak..*

1. To separate a subordinate clause when it is added after a main clause:

*The cat sat on the mat, purring contentedly.*

*He grabbed his waterproof, ramming it into his bag.*

1. Where a subordinate clause has been placed in the middle of a sentence, a comma should be used on either side of it:

*The cat, purring contentedly, sat on the mat.*

*He thought about what he would say, if he ever got back, to the person who hired the boats.*

**Activity 2**

Write out the following sentences, putting in commas where you think they should go:

1. After what seemed a lifetime I saw him at last.
2. He was wearing a shabby old bomber jacket faded blue jeans a pair of old trainers and was carrying his helmet.
3. I was about to go up to him if only my courage would hold out and warn him about the others.
4. Just before I reached him he swung round put his helmet on the counter ordered a coffee and then headed towards the payphone.

**Commas and Full stops – Don’t mix them up!**

A common mistake in students’ writing is to join two clauses using only a comma.

For example, here are two clause: **John got up. He put on his clothes.**

Some students write: **John got up, he put on his clothes.**

Joining sentences in this way leads to rambling, confusing sentences which are difficult to read.

Look at this passage:

* The passage consists of two long rambling sentences.
* The word **he** is repeated too many times.
* You don’t know whether it’s John or his dad who has to be at the works by 9.00: the repeated use of **he** makes the sentence confusing.

The alarm went off, John woke up, he turned over with a groan, the smell of frying bacon drifted into the room, he became conscious of his hunger, he’d eaten nothing since Sunday lunch. He knew it was late, his dad was cooking the breakfast, he had to get to the works by 9.00, he rolled away from the wall he hauled himself out of bed, he began to pull on his clothes.

**Activity**

Rewrite the passage, with a better use of punctuation and possibly adding in some more connectives (and, but, so, etc.). Try to vary the sentence length in the passage, as well as making sure that the meaning is clear.

To decide where your own sentences should stop, try reading you work out loud. Listen carefully to the way that you say it – if you had a short pause, you may require a comma; if you had a longer pause, you will probably need a full stop.

ANSWERS

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**Activity 2**

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