

Phrases:

Punctuation, Usage, and Grammar

Before we turn our attention to Level Four, clauses, let us highlight the more important rules that apply specifically to **phrases**. For a complete review of these rules, consult the appendix at the end of this book. In some cases we saw these errors at the first two levels, but now we are looking at them from a phrase perspective.

PUNCTUATION

comma (,):

after introductory participial phrases: Grabbing the rope, Bo blinked.

after long introductory prepositional phrases:

After a very bad and pointless giggle, Elenor glanced.

after multiple introductory prepositional phrases:

At the back of the boat at the dock, Hiram reflected.

in the day and year prepositional phrase: On March 12, 2008, Marcus meandered.

around nonessential participial phrases:

Lou, noticing nothing, nudged the petunia.

around most appositive phrases: Gilbert, the first winner, replied.

NOT after a short prepositional phrase: For you I found four yew.

NOT after a gerund phrase as subject: Chasing the dog was fun.

hyphen (-):

compound nouns that include prepositional phrases: father-in-law

As a general principle, we set off **major introductory elements** from the rest of the sentence. Major elements include long or multiple prepositional phrases, participial phrases, and introductory infinitive phrases. We also enclose interrupting elements in commas; this includes appositive phrases in most cases and participial phrases that are not sufficiently involved in the logic of the sentence.

Because **gerund phrases** and **infinitive phrases** can be nouns and therefore sometimes can be subjects, we must avoid putting commas between them and their predicates. Notice the absence of commas in these correct sentences:

Removing the rubble was a tedious and exhausting task.

To remove the rubble was a tedious and exhausting task.