

6 Worksheet on Grammar – Commas

Text: “A Tragedy’s Lessons”, from Düwel/Grün, *The Media*, Viewfinder Topics (München: Langenscheidt, 2011), pp. 12f.

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Good news: the use of commas in English is much easier than in German. Bad news: nevertheless, there are some rules. Here are the most important ones:

1. Like in German, use a **comma between items** in a list (items which are not separated by “and”, “or” etc.):

My favourite subjects are German, English and Maths.

or:

My favourite subjects are German, English, and Maths.

The comma in front of the “and” is optional.

2. **Unnecessary** relative clauses, which might be removed without changing the essential meaning of the sentence, must be marked off by commas.

Compare: Trees which have leaves in all seasons are called evergreen. This contrasts with deciduous plants, which completely lose their leaves in the cold and/ or dry seasons.

The first sentence is an example for a sentence with a necessary clause, the second is an example for a sentence with an unnecessary clause (or “parenthetical element”).

3. Use a comma to separate two independent clauses (with complete thoughts!) joined by the so-called **fanboys** conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*):

*Compare: My dog is my best friend, so I take him to a pet trainer. **vs.** She wore a warm jacket but no boots.*

You'll often be told that there's a comma when you pause in a sentence. That's not a fully reliable rule as different readers (as well as speakers, for that matter) pause in different places.

You'll also often read: "If in doubt, leave them out!" This rule is in fact useful.

B MISSING COMMAS – "A TRAGEDY'S LESSONS"

This is a copy of the beginning of the text in your book p. 12. Fill in the missing commas. Give an explanation for 4 of them.

Lessons should be learned from tragedy and there are lessons aplenty for our society from the cruel murder of JonBenet Ramsey. The six-year-old girl was assaulted and strangled in her Boulder Colo. home Christmas night. The case as yet unsolved remains headline news.

But even though the outcome is unclear we could benefit and improve the way we conduct our affairs by a thoughtful examination of the situation.

First there is the press. The manner in which it has conducted itself in its cutthroat competitive coverage of the story won't make for a glorious chapter in the history of our profession.

Hundreds of reporters from countries around the world have descended on the little university town of Boulder. Many have pushed and shoved and intruded on the Ramsey family and shocked Boulder residents with their aggressiveness. Particularly offensive have been reporters from sensational tabloids who are chasing a story replete with violence sex and intrigue - the stuff that these tabloids relish and on which they prosper.

Some news organizations have paid for information - for purloined pictures of the crime scene and pictures of the murdered child as a contestant in juvenile beauty competitions.

The New York Times reported that ABC and CBS competed in their bids for a video taken several years ago of the interior of the Ramsey home. Movies and books and TV docudramas are in the works.

The public has a right to know the facts about a murder high-profile or not. The press has a right to report it and even to conduct its own investigation. But I think people are finding increasingly distasteful the kind of media circus that often surrounds dramatic news events.

(Daniela Pröls)