

Use Commas to Add an Aside



THINKING The comma is a powerful tool that has a variety of uses. It will take time, certainly more than a single school year, for students to develop a full understanding of the comma. One of its uses is setting off parenthetical expressions from the main part of a sentence.

TEACHING When you listen to someone speak, the words seem to flow along easily. If you were to look at that same talk written down, you'd find that the sentences are more complicated than they sound. Punctuation would be needed in order to be able to read them with the same easy flow. Today we're going to talk about how to use the comma to insert an aside into a sentence.

What do I mean by an aside? You might also think of this as an extra tidbit of information you add to the middle of the sentence.

- Point to the sentences you have copied to chart paper.

Listen as I read this sentence:

- *I reminded my friend that he promised to trade desserts with me today.*

Listen to the sentence again, this time with that extra bit of information tucked inside:

- *I reminded my friend, who brought homemade brownies for dessert, that he promised to trade desserts with me today.*

Notice how I used commas to insert the new information. The new sentence reads smoothly, and it also gives the reader important information that wasn't included at first. The friend has homemade brownies for dessert. No wonder the narrator is reminding his friend about the promise to trade!

Look at these next two sentences:

- *My sister, who just got the cast off her foot, scored the winning run at today's softball game.*
- *After the trip to Boston, the one where we walked the Freedom Trail, our class gave a presentation to the whole school.*

Again, each sentence is complete and makes sense with the comment removed. But in both cases, the aside adds significant information for the reader. When you have information like this to include, you'll need to set the comment off with two commas—one before the aside and one after.

FOLLOW UP Students will sometimes use parentheses in their writing in order to add an aside. While this alternative works, you might take it as an opportunity to show them this use of the comma.

- Refer to the Using Commas to Add an Aside resource sheet. Students might keep this in their writing folders to record their growing understanding of how commas can be used. You may choose instead to document the uses on a poster-size version.

Conference Questions:

- Are there any sentences where you'd like to give the reader more information?
- How could adding an aside, with appropriate commas, help solve this problem?

PREP

- Using Commas to Add an Aside
- Sample Sentences copied onto chart paper

Using Commas to Add an Aside

| Use | Example |
|---|---|
| <p>Set off an “aside” from the main part of a sentence.</p> | <p>I reminded my friend, who brought homemade brownies for lunch, that he promised to trade with me today.</p> |
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