

COMMA ISSUES: Introductory Clauses and Commas with FANBOYS

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COMMAS AND INTRODUCTORY CLAUSES

Sentences often need to be modified in some way with an introductory clause to tell us the circumstances under which the action of the sentence takes place:

Sentence without an intro clause:	We will talk.
Sentence with a n intro clause:	If you stop being such a jerk, we will talk.
Sentence with a n intro clause:	During the commercial, we will talk

Use a comma to set off the introductory clause to tell us when the circumstances it describes ends and the main idea starts.

If you cook Grandma will do the dishes	(w/o the comma, possibly cooking grandma?)
If you cook, Grandma will do the dishes	(w/ comma, no cannibalism)

COMMAS AND COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

In English, we have words that are used to connect multiple ideas that we call coordinating conjunctions. They have a nickname: FANBOYS:

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

That's the complete list.

The problem: sometimes what coordinating conjunctions connect are pairs, while other times, they connect complete sentences. Each situation requires a different punctuation approach.

1. PAIRS (that aren't sentences)

When we link two words as a paired unit, they act as a single whole:

Peanut butter and jelly
Laughing and crying
Rinse and repeat
(X and Y)

These kinds of pairings DO NOT TAKE A COMMA. (The rule is different for three or more, btw).

2. COMPLETE SENTENCES

When two sentences are connected with a FANBOYS, a comma goes before the coordinating conjunction to show that what follows it is a new sentence we want to join to the first sentence:

I have a lot of goals in life, and I am here at college in order to help reach them.

I want to help, but I am not going to get involved in anything illegal.

Both have two sentences that are connected by comma+FANBOYS.

HOWEVER, notice that you can have a pair that looks like two sentences that won't take a comma:

I believe that every person will have to face his or her biggest fear and work hard to overcome it if they want to be successful.

Since there isn't a new subject after the AND, you really have an (X and Y) pair: *I believe that every person will have to X and Y.*