Using a Comma: Two Independent Clauses Separated by a Coordinating Conjunction

Comma Usage: This resource will help you determine how to use a comma preceding a coordinating conjunction.

**Rule:** Whenever you have two independent clauses separated by a coordinating conjunction, you must use a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

- Coordinating Conjunctions are words that connect either two independent clauses or an independent clause and a dependent clause. The coordinating conjunctions are *for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so.*
- Independent clauses are those clauses that make meaning and can stand alone. They make sense. John ran to the store.
- Dependent clauses are those clauses that cannot stand alone. Even if they have a subject and verb, their meaning is incomplete. While John ran to the store is a dependent clause because it doesn’t complete the meaning.

**Sentence A:** Correct comma usage: *John ran to the store, but he walked home.*

**Sentence B:** Incorrect comma usage: *John ran to the store, but walked home.*

The reason sentence B is incorrect is that the coordinating conjunction is separating an independent clause—John ran to the store from a dependent clause—walked home. If you put a comma before but, you have separated John—the subject—from his second verb—walked and subjects and verbs cannot be separated by only one comma.

Independent Clause + Coordinating Conjunction + Independent Clause always use a comma.

Independent Clause + Coordinating Conjunction + Dependent Clause do not use a comma.