



Commas and Introductory Elements: Phrases

An introductory element in a sentence is the word, phrase or clause that appears at the beginning of the sentence and before the main clause.

Example 1: *At the museum* the students saw paintings and sculptures.

In Example 1 *At the museum* is an introductory element. The main clause begins with the subject of the sentence, *the students*.

In this sentence the introductory element is a prepositional phrase beginning with the preposition *at*. In general a short introductory phrase does not require a comma after it unless a comma is needed to make the sentence understandable. Longer phrases of more than four or five words should have a comma following the phrase.

Example 2: *In the heat of the summer afternoon*, Janet walked to the corner store.

In Example 2 *In the heat of the summer afternoon* is an introductory prepositional phrase of seven words. There should be a comma after this introductory phrase.

Rewrite the sentences below, adding commas in the correct places.



On Tuesday we will go to the movies.



On the tall and slanted rooftop the cat sat silently watching.



To the sailor the ship was the most beautiful he had ever seen.



Across the lake a light flashed at the end of the dock.



Over the course of the semester the class will study fossils.