

Word for Word

Using commas with dates and locations



Proper placement of commas can be one of the most perplexing issues in writing. Comma errors are common in describing dates or locations that include a city and a state or country. But comma placement with dates and locations is easy if you remember a few rules. For US locations, the rule is quite simple: insert a comma after both the city name and state name in the absence of a zip code. If, however, a zip code is included, omit the comma after the state name.

Examples:

The patient was born in Houston, Texas, in 1975.

Please deliver to MD Anderson at 1515 Holcombe Boulevard,
Houston, Texas 77030.

When describing international locations, insert a comma after both the city name and the country name.

Example:

The conference was held in Paris, France, in 2012.

In dates, comma placement is determined by whether (and where) the day is included. If only the month and year are given, no commas are used. However, when the day follows the month, a comma should be placed after both the day and year.

Examples:

The patient first noticed symptoms in August 2012 but did not see a physician until January 2013.

We initiated our study on August 21, 2012, after receiving IRB approval.

When the day precedes the month (a common practice outside the United States), no commas are used.

Example:

The study began on 1 March 2012 and concluded on 28 February 2013.

Bibliography

AMA Manual of Style, 10th ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2007.

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