



## Commas with Nonessential Elements: Exercise Answers

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A. Are there any nonessential words, phrases, or clauses in the following sentences? If so, underline them and change the punctuation as appropriate.

1. Patterson Tower, the recently completed office building, is a monument to concrete ugliness.
2. The movie that I wanted to see is no longer playing.
3. Each person who enters the contest must send in two box tops.
4. John decided, nonetheless, not to buy the car.
5. The Mississippi River, which once flowed north into Hudson Bay, flows south into the Gulf of Mexico.
6. Your cat, watching the dog intently, walked carefully away.
7. The cat that was watching the dog most intently walked carefully away.
8. TV commercials, sometimes the most entertaining parts of a program, are essentially flashy corporate propaganda.
9. The dam project, which many in the government consider to be a sign of national strength, will destroy hundreds of villages and vast areas of wildlife habitat along the river banks.
10. The free-jazz musician Sun Ra claimed to be from Saturn.

B. Are the essential and nonessential elements in the following sentences punctuated correctly? If they are correct, write a C on the line to the left. If they are incorrect, put an X on the line. Do you know why the punctuation is correct or incorrect?

- C   1. The one woman who did not attend the meeting said that she had to study for her chemistry exam. [*who did not attend the meeting* is an essential clause, defining the specific woman in question.]
- X   2. He did not however intend to return the money he borrowed. [*however* is a nonessential word.]
- X   3. West Point cadets, who break the honor code, are expelled. [*who break the honor code* is an essential clause, defining a subset of cadets.]
- X   4. She was as a matter of fact chiefly interested in becoming a Hollywood celebrity. [*as a matter of fact* is a nonessential phrase.]
- C   5. Raul's wife, Conchita, is president of the local Red Cross. [*Conchita* is a nonessential word since *Raul's wife* already defines the specific person in question.]
- X   6. The German writer, Hermann Hesse, is a favorite with American college students. [*Hermann Hesse* is an essential term, defining the specific German writer in question.]
- X   7. The courthouse which was renovated recently was built in 1878. [*which was renovated recently* is a nonessential clause since *the courthouse* already defines the specific building in question.]
- X   8. Saul having forgotten to save his work lost all of his revisions when his computer crashed. [*having forgotten to save his work* is a nonessential phrase, merely modifying the word *Saul* .]
- C   9. St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, wrote his handbook of spiritual exercises in the sixteenth century. [*founder of the Society of Jesus* is a nonessential phrase, merely providing additional information about the subject.]
- X   10. The book, that your sister gave you for your birthday, won a National Book Award. [*that your sister gave you for your birthday* is an essential clause, defining the specific book in question.]

C. The following sentences have essential and nonessential words, phrases, and clauses in them. Put in the necessary punctuation.

1. The girl who teaches swimming at the neighborhood pool has a great deal of patience.
2. The girl, who enjoyed teaching swimming, decided to major in physical education at college.
3. The high school course that was most valuable to me was typing.
4. Maria, wearing an original dress of her own design, was the center of attention.
5. Dogsled mushing, which has been his favorite sport for years, requires a lot of effort.
6. Dauphin Island, located off the coast of Alabama, is a favorite spot for fishermen.

7. He saw his favorite movie, *Star Wars* , eight times.
8. Two of her friends, Kate and Beth, are planning to share an apartment with her next summer.
9. *Citizen Kane* , considered by many critics to be the greatest American film ever made, won only one Academy Award.
10. The officer who made the arrest had been investigated previously for excessive use of force.

D. Write your own sentences using essential and nonessential clauses.

1. Try using this pattern: (subject) who \_\_\_\_\_ (predicate).

possible answer: The doctor who examined you is nationally known for her cardiology research.

2. Try using this pattern: (subject), who \_\_\_\_\_, (predicate).

possible answer: The mayor, who won the election by a landslide, continues to promote community-based volunteer programs.

3. Try using this pattern: (subject), which \_\_\_\_\_, (predicate).

possible answer: James Joyce's *Ulysses* , which was banned in the US for obscenity when it was published, is now widely considered to be one of the great works of twentieth-century literature.

4. Try using this pattern: (subject) that \_\_\_\_\_ (predicate).

possible answer: The film that best exemplifies the French New Wave movement of the early 1960s is Jean-Luc Godard's *A Bout de Souffle* [*Breathless* ].

5.-8.: many possible answers....

You can go on to do Exercise #2 at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_commaessEX2.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_commaessEX2.html) or return to the handout on Commas with Essential and Non-Essentials at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_commaess.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_commaess.html) to review any rules you want to reread.

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