

Many students learn to think of commas as markers for pauses in speech, but in formal writing commas follow grammatical rules, not breathing points. One common source of confusion is whether to use a comma before *because*.

In most cases, no comma is needed, but in some sentences a comma prevents misunderstanding or ambiguity. Learning this rule helps writers avoid accidental changes in meaning and write more clearly and precisely.

### Basic principle

The word *because* introduces a dependent clause that explains the reason for something in the main clause.

### Standard rule

- Do not usually put a comma before *because*.
- Use a comma only if leaving it out would create confusion or change the meaning.

### What is a dependent clause?

A dependent clause has a subject and a verb but cannot stand alone as a complete sentence. It depends on an independent clause.

### Example

*Because it was raining* → dependent clause

*We stayed inside* → independent clause

*We stayed inside because it was raining.* → complete sentence

Dependent clauses often begin with words such as *because, although, if, when, and since*.

### Examples without a comma

*I stayed home because it was raining.*

*She smiled because she was happy.*

In both sentences, the reason clause is directly connected to the main clause, so no comma is needed.

**When a comma can be used**

Use a comma if the sentence could be misread without it.

In most sentences, no comma is needed before *because*. However, in negative sentences a comma can change the meaning.

**Example**

*I didn't call him, because I was busy.* → Meaning: I was busy, so that is why I didn't call.

*I didn't call him because I was busy.* → Meaning: Being busy was not the reason I didn't call.

The comma changes the sentence from giving a reason to denying a reason.

**Why this happens**

Without the comma, the *because* clause can be interpreted as part of the denial.

**Compare:**

*She didn't fail, because she studied.* → She studied, so she didn't fail.

*She didn't fail because she studied.* → Studying was not the reason she failed.

**Scrib.tip:** This issue usually appears in negative sentences (*didn't, wasn't, never, couldn't*). When you write a negative sentence, ask:

Am I giving a reason, or denying one?

- Giving a reason → comma possible
- Just explaining normally → no comma

**Key takeaway**

Use a comma before *because* only when it prevents ambiguity. Otherwise, leave it out.