Commas with Coordinate Adjectives

Name: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____ / 10

Quick Review

When two adjectives in a row both modify the noun SEPARATELY, they are COORDINATE and need a comma between them: 'a dark, stormy night.' Use the AND test (can you say 'a dark AND stormy night'?) and the SWAP test (can you say 'a stormy, dark night'?). If BOTH work, the adjectives are coordinate — add the comma. When the adjectives build on each other so order matters and 'and' sounds wrong, they are CUMULATIVE and take NO comma: 'three red bricks' (NOT 'three AND red bricks,' NOT 'red three bricks'). Number words, size + color, age + material, and similar stacked categories are almost always cumulative.

PRACTICE

Choose the correct answer for each question.

1. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

A. She wore a long elegant gown to the gala.

B. She wore a long, elegant gown to the gala.

C. She wore a, long elegant gown to the gala.

D. She wore a long elegant, gown to the gala.

2. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

A. The boy climbed onto three, wooden crates.

B. The boy climbed onto three wooden, crates.

C. The boy climbed onto three wooden crates.

D. The boy climbed onto, three wooden crates.

3. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

A. A cold sharp wind cut across the field.

B. A cold sharp, wind cut across the field.

C. A cold, sharp wind cut across the field.

D. A, cold sharp wind cut across the field.

4. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

A. My grandmother knitted a soft, blue, sweater for the baby.

B. My grandmother knitted a soft, blue sweater for the baby.

C. My grandmother knitted a soft blue sweater for the baby.

D. My grandmother knitted a, soft blue sweater for the baby.

5. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

A. He bought an expensive, Italian, leather jacket.

B. He bought an expensive Italian, leather jacket.

C. He bought an expensive Italian leather jacket.

D. He bought an expensive, Italian leather jacket.

6. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

A. The tired hungry hikers reached camp at dusk.

B. The tired, hungry hikers reached camp at dusk.

C. The tired hungry, hikers reached camp at dusk.

D. The, tired hungry hikers reached camp at dusk.

7. Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

A. Several old, paperback books sat on the shelf.

B. Several, old paperback books sat on the shelf.

C. Several old paperback books sat on the shelf.

D. Several, old, paperback books sat on the shelf.

8. Read this sentence: 'The quiet thoughtful student raised her hand.' What is the BEST revision?

A. The quiet, thoughtful student raised her hand.

B. The quiet thoughtful, student raised her hand.

C. The, quiet thoughtful student raised her hand.

D. The sentence is correct as written.

9. Rewrite this sentence, adding a comma ONLY if the adjectives are coordinate: 'The students opened a heavy dusty old textbook.' Then write one sentence explaining how the AND test and the SWAP test support your choice.

_____

_____

10. Write TWO sentences about a meal. In the first sentence, use two COORDINATE adjectives with a comma between them. In the second sentence, use two CUMULATIVE adjectives with NO comma between them.

_____

_____

Answer Keys

1	A	**B**	C	D	6	A	**B**	C	D
2	A	B	**C**	D	7	A	B	**C**	D
3	A	B	**C**	D	8	**A**	B	C	D
4	A	**B**	C	D	9	See below			
5	A	B	**C**	D	10	See below			

Explanations

1. B	'Long' and 'elegant' are COORDINATE adjectives — both modify 'gown' separately. The AND test works ('a long AND elegant gown'), and the SWAP test works ('an elegant, long gown'), so a comma belongs between them. A omits the needed comma. C inserts a comma between the article 'a' and the first adjective, which is never correct. D places a comma between the final adjective and the noun, which is also never correct.
2. C	'Three' and 'wooden' are CUMULATIVE adjectives — they stack in a fixed order (number then material) and cannot be reversed ('wooden three crates' is wrong) or joined with 'and' ('three AND wooden crates' is wrong). No comma belongs between them. A puts a comma where the tests fail. B places a comma between the final adjective and the noun. D drops a stray comma after the preposition.
3. C	'Cold' and 'sharp' are COORDINATE — the AND test works ('a cold AND sharp wind') and the SWAP test works ('a sharp, cold wind'), so a comma is required. A drops that comma. B places the comma between the second adjective and the noun, which never takes a comma. D puts a comma between the article and the first adjective, which also never takes a comma.
4. B	'Soft' and 'blue' read as coordinate here — the AND test works ('a soft AND blue sweater') and the SWAP test works ('a blue, soft sweater'), so a comma belongs between them. A adds an extra wrong comma between 'blue' and the noun 'sweater.' C drops the needed comma between the two coordinate adjectives. D inserts a comma between the article and the first adjective.
5. C	'Expensive,' 'Italian,' and 'leather' are CUMULATIVE — the order (opinion, origin, material) is fixed, and 'expensive AND Italian AND leather jacket' sounds wrong. No commas belong between them. A adds two wrong commas, treating cumulative adjectives as coordinate. B adds one wrong comma. D also adds one wrong comma between 'expensive' and 'Italian.'
6. B	'Tired' and 'hungry' are COORDINATE — both describe the hikers separately, the AND test works ('tired AND hungry hikers'), and the SWAP test works ('hungry, tired hikers'). A comma is required between them. A drops the comma. C places it between the second adjective and the noun. D places it between the article and the first adjective.
7. C	'Several,' 'old,' and 'paperback' are CUMULATIVE — they stack in a fixed order (number, age, material), and reversing them ('paperback old several books') or inserting 'and' between them sounds wrong. No commas belong between them. A puts a comma between 'old' and 'paperback,' but they fail the AND/SWAP tests. B and D add commas after 'several,' but a number word and the adjective after it are cumulative, not coordinate.
8. A	'Quiet' and 'thoughtful' are COORDINATE — the AND test works ('a quiet AND thoughtful student') and the SWAP test works ('a thoughtful, quiet student'), so a comma is needed between them. The original drops that required comma, which is why D is wrong. B places the comma between the final adjective and the noun. C places it between the article and the first adjective.

9.	**Answer:** Sample answer: The students opened a heavy, dusty old textbook. 'Heavy' and 'dusty' pass both tests ('heavy AND dusty,' 'dusty, heavy'), so they are coordinate and take a comma; 'dusty' and 'old' fail the tests ('dusty AND old textbook' sounds off and 'old dusty' shifts the meaning), so they are cumulative and take no comma. Strong answers apply the AND test and the SWAP test to each pair of adjectives in turn. 'Heavy' and 'dusty' both describe the book in separate, independent ways, so they are coordinate and need a comma. 'Dusty' and 'old' belong to closely related categories (condition + age) that stack rather than separate, so they are cumulative and take no comma. Any answer that adds exactly one comma (after 'heavy') and explains the reasoning with the two tests is correct.
10.	**Answer:** Sample answer: We shared a warm, comforting bowl of soup. My uncle baked three small loaves of bread. The first sentence must pair adjectives that pass both tests — 'warm' and 'comforting' both describe the soup independently ('warm AND comforting' works; 'comforting, warm' works), so the comma is correct. The second must pair adjectives that fail the tests — 'three' and 'small' stack in fixed order (number + size) and cannot be reversed or joined with 'and,' so no comma belongs between them. Any answer that follows this comma/no-comma pattern with adjectives that match each rule is correct.

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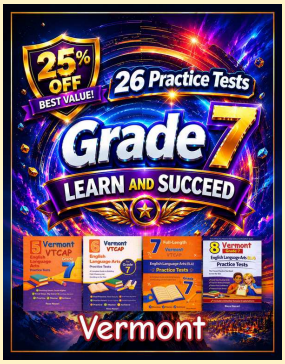

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