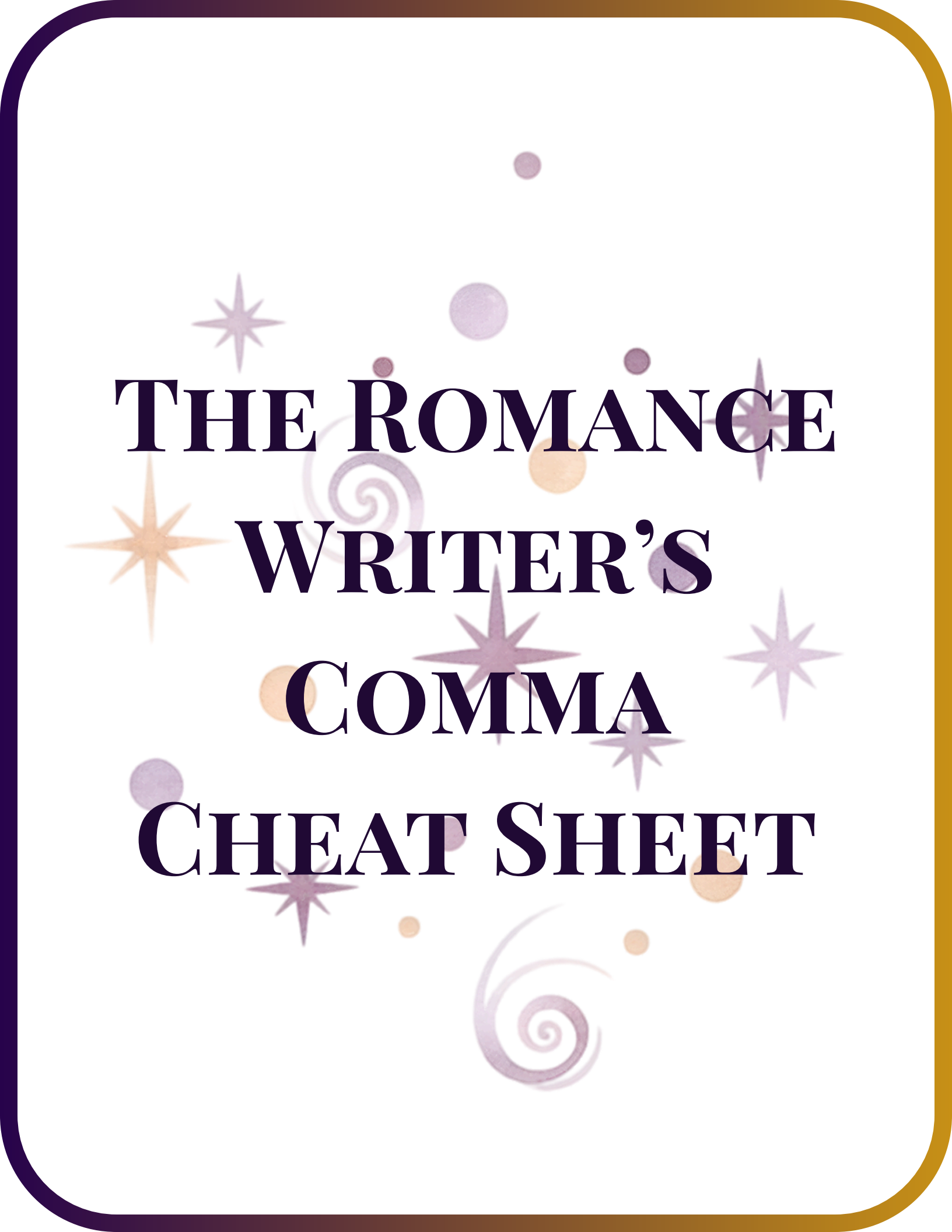
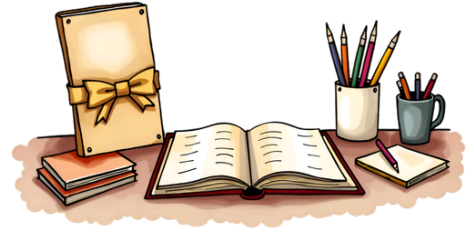




THE ROMANCE WRITER'S COMMA CHEAT SHEET

The Romance Writer's Comma Cheat Sheet

Common comma decisions made simple



Introductory Elements

Rule: Use a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or clause that comes before the main sentence.

Incorrect: ✗ "With a shaking hand she reached for the letter."

Correct: ✓ "With a shaking hand, she reached for the letter he'd left on her doorstep."

✓ "Before she could speak, Callum stepped forward and took her hands in his."

✓ "When the last guest finally left, Marisol allowed herself to cry."

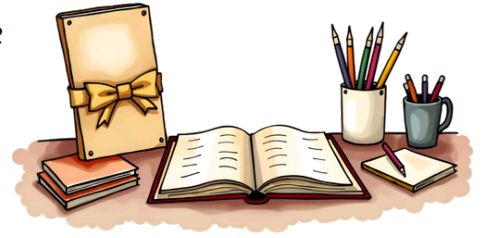
Write some example sentences of your own:

💡 **Quick Tip:** Short intros (1–2 words like "Finally," or "Slowly,") still get the comma. When in doubt, add it.



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Dialogue Commas

Rule: Use a comma *before* a dialogue tag. The tag is part of the same sentence as the dialogue.

Incorrect: ❌ "I never stopped loving you." she whispered.
❌ "We need to talk," Declan said. His jaw was tight. (incorrectly split)

Correct: ✅ "With a shaking hand, she reached for the letter he'd left on her doorstep."
✅ "I never stopped loving you," she whispered.
✅ "We need to talk," Declan said, his jaw tight.

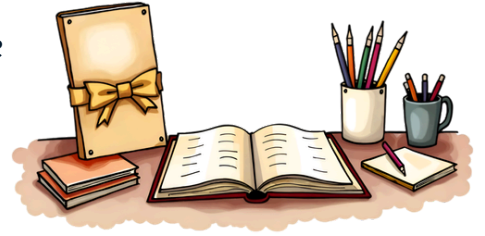
Write some example sentences of your own:

Quick Tip: If you can replace the tag with "said" and it still makes sense, you need a comma, not a period.



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Compound Sentences (FANBOYS)

Rule: When joining two complete sentences with a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), use a comma before the conjunction.

Incorrect: ✗ *"She wanted to trust him but three years of silence had taught her better."*

Correct: ✓ *"She wanted to trust him, but three years of silence had taught her better."*

✓ *"He'd rehearsed this moment a hundred times, yet every word deserted him now."*

✓ *Short clause exception: "He smiled and she melted." (very short— comma optional)*

Write some example sentences of your own:

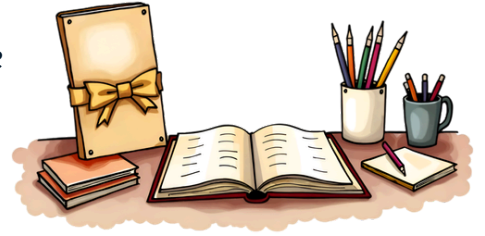


Quick Tip: Test it: can each side stand alone as a sentence? If yes, add the comma.



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Common comma decisions made simple



Nonessential Phrases

Rule: Use commas to set off information that adds detail but isn't necessary to identify the subject or complete the sentence's meaning.

Incorrect: ✗ "Theo who had never once apologized for anything said the words." (missing commas)

Correct: ✓ "Theo, who had never once apologized for anything, said the words like they cost him everything."

✓ "The letter, dated three months ago, had been sitting unopened on his desk."

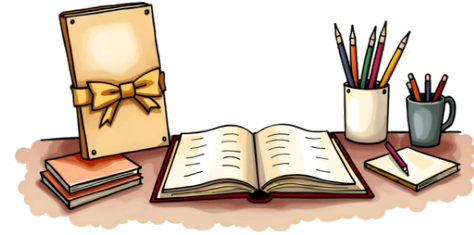
Write some example sentences of your own:

💡 **Quick Tip:** Cover the phrase with your thumb. If the sentence still makes sense and the subject is still clear, the phrase is nonessential, so add commas around it.



The Romance Writer's Comma Cheat Sheet

Common comma decisions made simple



Direct Address (Vocatives)

Rule: Always use a comma to set off the name or term of address when speaking directly to someone.

Incorrect: ✗ "I meant what I said Marisol." (missing comma—changes meaning)

Correct: ✓ "I meant what I said, Marisol."
✓ "Sera, don't you dare walk out that door."
✓ "Tell me the truth, sweetheart. All of it."

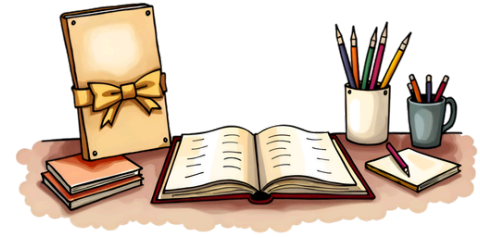
Write some example sentences of your own:

 **Quick Tip:** This one changes meaning! "Let's eat, Grandma" vs. "Let's eat Grandma." Commas save lives—and romance heroines.



The Romance Writer's Comma Cheat Sheet

Common comma decisions made simple



Dialogue Beats vs Tags

Rule: Dialogue tags (said, whispered, asked) connect with a comma. Action beats (she turned, he exhaled) are separate sentences—use a period.

Incorrect: ✗ "We should go," She turned toward the door. (comma + capitalized action)
✗ "We should go." she said. (period before tag)

Correct: ✓ TAG: "We should go," she said.

✓ BEAT: "We should go." She turned toward the door.

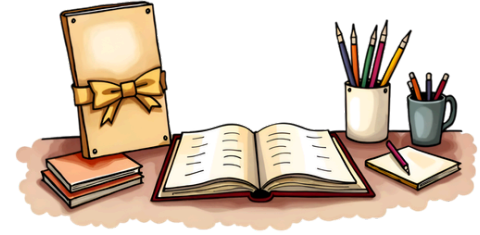
Write some example sentences of your own:

💡 **Quick Tip:** Is it a speaking verb (said, whispered, murmured)? → comma. A physical action (she smiled, he crossed his arms)? → period.



The Romance Writer's Comma Cheat Sheet

Common comma decisions made simple



Comma vs Em Dash

Rule: Both set off extra information, but carry different weight. Commas = smooth, expected. Em dashes = abrupt, dramatic, emphatic—and they're also the go-to for interruptions, whether someone's cut off mid-thought or a beat breaks in.

Incorrect: ❌ "She'd waited five years, maybe more—for this moment." (mixing comma and em dash to set off the same phrase)
❌ "He stopped, midsentence and looked away." (comma can't carry the abrupt break this moment needs)
❌ "I just wanted to say," "Don't." Callum's voice was flat. "Don't apologize." (a comma can't convey the abrupt cutoff—it reads as a pause, not an interruption)

Correct: ✅ "She'd waited five years—maybe more—for this moment." (em dash pair, used consistently)
✅ "He stopped midsentence—and looked away." (em dash signals the sudden shift)
✅ "I just wanted to say—" "Don't." Callum's voice was flat. "Don't apologize." (em dash shows the interruption itself)

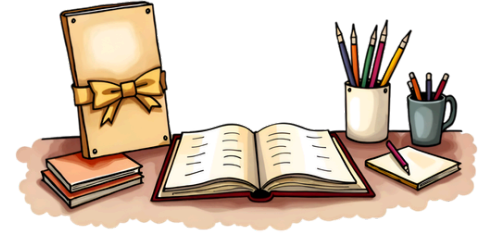
Write some example sentences of your own:

💡 **Quick Tip:** In romance, em dashes are your best friend for tension and interruption. But don't overuse them—save them for the moments that hit hardest. And don't let AI paranoia hold you back: em dashes have been a writer's tool for centuries. Using them with intention is a craft choice, not a red flag.



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Common comma decisions made simple



Comma vs Semicolon

Rule: Use a comma to join two ideas when you also use a conjunction (and, but, or, so, yet).

Use a semicolon to join two complete sentences that are closely related—no conjunction needed.

Incorrect: ✗ "She wanted to tell him, she couldn't find the words." (Comma splice—two full sentences joined only by a comma)

Correct: ✓ "She wanted to tell him, but she couldn't find the words." (comma + conjunction)

Correct: ✓ "She wanted to tell him; she couldn't find the words." (semicolon joining two complete thoughts)

Correct: ✓ "The rain kept falling, but she didn't move from the porch."

Correct: ✓ "The rain kept falling; she didn't move from the porch."

Write some example sentences of your own:

💡 **Quick Tip:** If both sides can stand alone as full sentences, a semicolon works. If only one side can stand alone, use a comma + conjunction instead.



Notes



Nice work!

You've just gone through the Romance Writer's Comma Cheat Sheet lesson from Amaze Inn Proofreading! I hope it's a resource you find yourself reaching for again and again as you polish your writing.

Punctuation doesn't have to be a stumbling block. With a little awareness and the right tools, it becomes second nature.

Happy writing, and even happier editing!

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