

# The Interrupter

Recognize an *interrupter* when you see one.

An interrupter is a word, phrase, or clause that significantly breaks the flow of a sentence. Read the examples that follow:

Please take those smelly socks to the garage, *Kris*, and put them in the washing machine.

My essay, *to be perfectly honest*, flew out of the bus window while I was riding to school.

What you just ate, *if you must know*, was squid eyeball stew.

Punctuate an interrupter correctly.

Generally, you separate an interrupter from the rest of the sentence with commas—one in front of the interrupter and one behind. The pattern looks like this:

**THE FIRST PART OF THE SENTENCE** +, + **INTERRUPTER** +, +  
**THE REST OF THE SENTENCE** .

Check out these examples:

Jerome's calculus teacher is usually a real slave driver. Tonight, *surprisingly*, Jerome has only fifty problems to solve as homework.

My cat Fuzz loves to curl up on my lap and sleep. Buster, *on the other hand*, prefers to use my thigh as a scratching post.

The bathroom tiles, *whenever time permits*, require a good scrubbing, for the grout is black with mold.

If you want to emphasize the break more strongly, use dashes to separate the interrupter from the rest of the sentence. The pattern looks like this:

**THE FIRST PART OF THE SENTENCE** + — + **INTERRUPTER** + — +  
**THE REST OF THE SENTENCE** .

These sentences illustrate the pattern:

That chocolate-broccoli muffin—*though a good source of vitamin C*—will upset Frank's stomach this early in the morning.

My brother's seven-foot python—*aptly named Squeeze*—slithered out the open back door and frightened Mrs. Russell, our next-door neighbor, nearly to death.

That nuclear orange jacket—*believe me*—fails to complement your lime green pants.



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