10 WAYS TO USE COMMAS

Commas are good, all-purpose separators, but when used incorrectly in a sentence, they can cause **confusion or even a misreading of the information.** Since comma usage is so complex, the following 'rules' should help you.

1. **Use a comma to separate independent clauses that are connected by a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS- for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).** Two independent clauses can each stand alone as a sentence, but they can be joined using a coordinating conjunction which depicts their relationship.
   - Harold Smith submitted the proposal last week, but his supervisor did not approve it.

2. **Use commas to separate items in a series of three or more.** Place a comma after each item except the last.
   - We ordered paper, pencils, correction fluid, and erasers.
   - Dr. Jones considered hiring a bookkeeper, renting a computer, or purchasing an accounting system.

3. **Use a comma after a long introductory element (more than three words) and after any introductory element containing a verb form.**
   - After the fire in the stockroom, our insurance premiums increased.
   - Although he worked overtime, he did not get paid anything extra.
   - Because we studied all night, we overslept and missed the exam.
     But no comma: We overslept and missed the exam because we studied all night.

4. **Use a comma to separate coordinate adjectives, which are of equal importance and which modify the same noun.** They can usually be expressed in reverse order; in addition, the word "and" could replace the comma.
   - We met in a hot, stuffy, smoke-filled room. *OR* We met in a hot and stuffy room.
   - Robin was an honest, ambitious supervisor.

5. Use a comma (or a pair of commas) to distinguish parenthetical expressions (transitional words or phrases and interrupters), names in direct address, and interjections.
   - On the other hand, the board defeated our proposal. (Parenthetical expressions)
   - The new copying machine, according to the sales clerk, will make twice as many copies per hour as the old machine made. (Parenthetical expressions)
   - I can assure you, Ms. Green, that I have finished the report. (Direct address)
   - We hope to have the items in stock next week, Mr. Graves. (Direct address)

6. Use a comma to signal the introduction of a direct quotation and to separate the speaker's identity from the direct quotation. Use a pair of commas when the identification interrupts a sentence. Use a period as shown when the quotation forms two sentences. Commas and periods always go within the close quotation mark.
   - "Finish the report by Thursday," said Ms. Green.
   - "Finish the report by Thursday," Ms. Green said, "and you can take Friday off."

7. Use commas to separate the major portions of dates of geographical areas and in figures according to convention. Note that some business styles permit omission of the final comma with dates and states.
   - Our main offices are being remodeled on Thursday, October 25, 2019, along with our branches in Austin, Texas, and Norfolk, Virginia. However, our Houston office will not be renovated until March 1990.

8. Use commas to help signal contrasted items.
   - This memo should be reproduced by the printer, not by the copier.

9. Use commas to help prevent confusion, misunderstanding, or misreading.
   - When I turned forty, three people congratulated me.
   - A few days before, I saw him at the store.

10. Use a comma (or pair of commas) to separate nonrestrictive modifiers and appositives. Note that restrictive elements (not set off by commas) are essential elements that restrict, limit, or define the terms they relate to. Nonrestrictive elements are not essential to restrict, limit, or define the terms they relate to.
    - Management's final proposal, which urged arbitration, did not satisfy the union.
    - Furthermore, the union's negotiator, who moderated the discussion, seemed biased.
    - The negotiating committee's proposal, which the union wanted to adopt, included a seven percent pay increase.