

## The Comma

### Six main uses of the comma

1. to separate items in a series
2. to set off introductory material
3. on both sides of words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence
4. between two independent clauses with the use of a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS)
5. to set off a *direct* quotation from the rest of the sentence
6. For certain everyday material.

### Rule 1 – Use a comma to separate items in a series.

#### Examples:

- Magazines, paperback novels, and textbooks crowded the shelves.
- Mark sat in the office, checked his watch, and flipped nervously through a magazine.
- Lola bit into the ripe, juicy apple
  - NOTE: a comma is used between two adjectives in a series only if *and* inserted between the words sounds natural.

### Rule 2—After introductory material

- **Prepositional Phrases** – put a comma after prepositional phrases that begin sentences
  - **Example:** Inside the house, John started to yell.
  - Some Prepositions: in, on, after, before, by, with, from, around
- **Subordinate Clauses** – Put a comma after subordinate clauses that begin sentences.
  - **Example:** When Maria dropped the book, Mark screamed.
  - Some Subordinating Conjunctions: when, as, if, since, because, while, after, unless, although
- **Conjunctive Adverbs** – Put a comma after a conjunctive adverb (or transition word)
  - **Example:** However, I will not attend that school.
  - Conjunctive Adverbs: however, therefore, hence, thus, then, indeed, rather, furthermore, nevertheless, in addition, consequently

### Rule 3—Around words interrupting the flow of thought

- If you have information that interrupts the flow of the sentence, and it can be deleted, then you need commas to surround it.

#### Examples:

- The car, cleaned and repaired, is ready to be sold.
- Gene, the protagonist, pushes his friend from a tree.
- Taking long walks, especially after dark, helps me sort out my thoughts.

## **Rule 4—Between two complete sentences that are joined with a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS)**

- When two complete sentences are brought together with **For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, or So**, you need a comma before the FANBOYS word.

Example:

- Ralph ran into the forest, and the savages followed him.

## **Rule 5—With direct quotations**

Examples:

- “Please take a number,” said the deli clerk.
- Bradbury writes, “I have never even driven a car” (12).
- “Reading this,” complained Mike, “is about as interesting as watching paint dry.”

Note: Commas and periods at the end of a quotation go inside quotation marks unless there is a page number.

## **Rule 6—With everyday material**

Examples:

- **[for persons spoken to]** I think, Sam, that you are in trouble.
- **[dates]** Our house was hit by lightening on July 23, 2004.
- **[addresses]** Mark Smith lives at 8953 Kolmar Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60657.
- **[openings or closings of letters]** Dear Suzy, or Sincerely,
  - Note: in formal letters, a colon is used after the opening. Dear Mr. Smith:
- **[numbers]** We estimate that our town spends 1,440,550 dollars each year on road construction.
- **[tag questions]** You did remember the salsa, **didn't you?**
- **[interjections]** Oh, I'm sure it will be all right.