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.
- [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.