Commas

Rule 1: To Separate Sentences
Commas can be used to separate independent clauses — phrases that could stand alone as sentences — by joining together the clauses with one of the following conjunctions:

   for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

Examples:
   a. Kendall thought her paper was due yesterday, but it was actually due today.
   b. Jerry likes apples, and he prefers Gala to Fuji.

Rule 2: To Set Off Introductory Phrases
Introductory phrases are phrases that introduce the action of the sentence before the actual main clause begins. Common starter words are:

   after, although, as, because, if, since, when, while.

Examples:
   a. While watching The Oscars, I cried.
   b. If The Office does not win, I may cry even harder.

   An introductory phrase can also be one word like:

   yes, well, however.

Example:
   a. However, I may cry happily if Modern Family wins.

Rule 3: To Set Off Quotes
Use commas to set off some quotations.

Examples:
   a. Fariba said, “Why do you want to take pictures of me?”
   b. “Yes, I’m pregnant,” said Alex.
Rule 4: To Separate Inserted Thoughts Within a Sentence

Commas are used to separate inserted thoughts within a sentence. These thoughts are additional information and are important, but not necessary, to communicate the main idea of the sentence. Use one comma before to indicate the beginning of the thought and one at the end to indicate the end of the thought.

**Examples:**
- Emma Watson, a United Nations Ambassador, does a lot of work for gender equality.
- I like red apples, especially Galas, more than green apples.

**Tip:** Ask yourself this question: if you leave the phrase(s) out, does the sentence still make sense? If your answer is yes, then you probably need commas.

Rule 5: Lists

Use commas to separate items in a list.

**Examples:**
- I like *Real Housewives of Atlanta, Bad Girls Club, and Fashion Police*.
- The snow, the ice, and the cold are my least favorite parts of winter.

**Tip:** An oxford comma is the comma that separates the last and second-to-last items in a list. In some fields, it is unnecessary, but we recommend using in almost all cases.

Rule 6: To Separate Adjectives

Use commas to separate two or more adjectives that describe the same noun.

**Examples:**
- The dress she wore was a hideous, green monstrosity.
- I told him that I was a smart, funny person.

**Tip:** Ask yourself these questions: Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written in reverse order? Does it make sense if the adjectives are written with *and* between them? If yes, then the sentence will need commas.
Rule 7: Geographical Names, Dates, Addresses, and Titles in Names

Use commas in geographical names, dates, addresses, and titles in names.

Examples:

a. Boone, North Carolina
b. October 10, 2009
c. 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C.
d. Sally Parlier, Ph.D.

When included in a sentence, these items will also have commas at the end to offset them from the rest of the text.

Examples:

a. Boone, North Carolina, gets its name from Daniel Boone.
b. October 10, 2009, was an important day in her life.

Comma Joke:

What’s the difference between a cat and a comma?

A comma is a pause at the end of a clause; a cat has claws at the end of its paws.