

RULES FOR COMMAS

1) A comma precedes a coordinating conjunction that links independent clauses.

- Note: do not use a comma before a coordinating conjunction that links parts of a compound verb:

“The Three Stooges ran down the hill and slipped in the mud.”

2) A comma usually follows introductory words, phrases, and clauses.

- Place a comma after the subordinate clause if it comes before an independent clause; however, when the subordinate clause follows an independent clause, there is usually no need for a comma:

COMMA “Because I am good with animals, I want to become a vet.”

NO COMMA “I want to become a vet because I am good with animals.”

- A comma usually follows an introductory prepositional phrase.

3) Commas separate words, phrases, and clauses in a series (including coordinate adjectives).

- Use a comma between coordinate adjectives that are not linked by a coordinating conjunction. Adjectives are coordinate if you can interchange them, or if you can put “and” between them.

- “He always wears that big, green, ugly sweater.”

(big, green, and ugly = coordinate adjectives)

- “I love sharp, fresh cheddar cheese.”

(sharp and fresh = coordinate; fresh and cheddar = non-coordinate)

4) Commas set of nonrestrictive and other parenthetical elements.

- Nonrestrictive phrases and clauses give nonessential information; restrictive phrases and clauses are essential to sentence’s meaning.

- “Joe Garage, who plays a mean guitar, is my cousin.”

(who plays a mean guitar = non-restrictive)

- “The Joe Garage who plays a mean guitar is my cousin.”

(who plays a mean guitar = restrictive)

- “Snakes which have stripes on their backs are usually poisonous”

(which have stripes on their backs = restrictive)

- Coral snakes, which have stripes on their backs, are friendly”

(which have stripes on their backs = non-restrictive)

5) Commas separate contrasted elements from the rest of the sentence.

- For example: Aerobic dance imparts cardiovascular fitness, not just improved muscle tone.

6) Commas separate geographical names and items in dates and addresses.

7) Occasionally a comma may be needed for ease in reading.

