Commas

1. [Introductory information], [complete sentence].
   Use a comma to set off an introduction to the main part of the sentence.
   
   Because it was going to be snowing on Halloween, Jackie decided not to go as a ballerina.
   
   However, she decided that she would rather go as a gorilla.

2. [Complete sentence], [coordinating conjunction] [complete sentence].
   Use a comma between two complete sentences joined with a coordinating conjunction.
   There are 7 coordinating conjunctions: and, but, or, nor, yet, so, for.
   
   Jimmy was excited about getting a lot of candy, but his mother was not thrilled.

   **Common mistake: Unnecessary comma**—Using a comma with a conjunction to join a complete sentence to an incomplete sentence.
   
   **Incorrect**—Jimmy wanted to wear fake blood, and cried when his mother told him no.
   **Correct**—Jimmy wanted to wear fake blood and cried when his mother told him no.
   
   **Also correct**—Jimmy wanted to wear fake blood, and he cried when his mother told him no.

   **Common mistake: Comma splice**—Using a comma to join two complete sentences without a conjunction.
   
   **Incorrect**—[Complete sentence], [complete sentence].
   Jackie practiced growling in front of the mirror, she scared her little brother.
   
   **Correct**—[Complete sentence], [coordinating conjunction] [complete sentence].
   
   Jackie practiced growling in front of the mirror, and she scared her little brother.
   **Also correct**—Combining the 2 sentences with a semicolon or separating them with a period.

3. **Academic writing:** [item in a list], [item in a list], [and item in a list]
   
   **Journalism:** [item in a list], [item in a list] [and item in a list]
   In academic writing, use commas to separate each item in a list of three or more items. In journalistic writing, omit the comma between the second-to-last and last items.
   
   **Academic:** My favorite types of candy are jellybeans, chocolates, and gum drops.
   
   **Journalistic:** My favorite types of candy are jellybeans, chocolates and gum drops.

4. **Part of a sentence, non-essential addition, part of a sentence.**
   Use commas to set off additional information that is not necessary within a sentence.
   Information is not necessary if removing it does not change the meaning of the sentence.
Jackie left her father’s truck, still caked in snow, and began ringing doorbells. 
(Note that removing “still caked in snow” does not change the meaning.)

Do not use commas if removing the information changes the meaning of the sentence.

Incorrect-The children, who went down Third Street, received many Snickers.
Correct-The children who went down Third Street received many Snickers.
(Removing “who went down Third Street” makes it seem that all of the children received Snickers. In this case, the writer wants to convey that only the children who went down Third Street received many Snickers.)

5. [adjective], [adjective] [noun]
Use commas between two adjectives that work independently to describe the same noun.

We were happy to end up at the party at Mrs. Haunt’s warm, cozy home.

6. [day of the week], [month] [day of the month], [year] and [city], [state], [country]
Use commas to set apart the words in a date and the numbers in a date as well as the places in geographical locations.

Saturday, November 1, 2009 was a day when many children had stomachaches in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

7. Introduction to a quote
Place a comma after the introduction to the speaker of a quote.

Mrs. Haunt said, “Good night.”
If the introduction comes in the middle of the quote, also place a comma inside the closing quotation mark of the first half of the quote.

“Halloween,” Dr. Ghost insists, “is the most creative holiday.”

8. Direct Address
When addressing someone directly, set off that person’s name in commas.

I agree with you, Dr. Ghost.
Yes, Dr. Ghost, I agree with you.

9. Interjections
Use commas to set off brief interjections like yes or no, as well as short questions that fall at the end of sentences.

Jimmy’s mom said that, no, he couldn’t have any more candy tonight.