Common Commas

1   (INTRO)DUCTORY CLAUSES

Rule: Use a comma to offset a word or grouping of words (especially when there are 3 or more) coming before the grammatical subject of a sentence. (Note: This rule varies in some disciplines or writing contexts.)

Structure: **Intro,** (S)ubject *(V)erb* phrase.
Examples: **After looking under the couch,** I hopelessly *sat* down.
　　　　　As a result, I *found* my keys in my back pocket.
　　　　　Without further ado, I *rushed* off to the birthday party.
　　　　　Furthermore, he *was* a little crazy.

2   (CC) COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS (*F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.*)

Rule: A comma is necessary when a sentence contains two independent clauses (**S**ubject-**V**erb phrase) that are connected by one of these joining words: *For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So.* (Exception: If the two clauses have the same subject and the coordinating conjunction is *and,* the comma is permitted but not required.)

You should only use one coordinating conjunction per sentence unless you have a colon or semi-colon.

Structure: (S₁)ubject *(V₁)erb***, (CC)** (S₂)ubject *(V₂)erb*.

Example: The journal article *opened* my eyes**, but** then I *needed* sunglasses.

　　　　　I *found* the movie engaging**, so** I *bought* the DVD.
　　　　　Paul *baked* cookies **and** he *shared* them with the rest of us. (Comma optional)

3   (P)ARENTHETICAL / NON-ESSENTIAL PHRASES / INTERJECTIONS

Rule: Use commas to offset extra information--insertions that are not necessary but may be helpful for your reader. Sometimes, these insertions interrupt the text; other times, these insertions come at the end of the sentence, acting to define or nuance another word or phrase.

Possible Structures: **S, P,** *V*. 　　 **Intro,** S V**, P**. 　　 S₁ *V₁* **, P,** CC S₂ **, P,** *V₂***, P**.
Example: My mom**, the lawyer,** *baked* cookies.
　　　　　Without a doubt, she *excelled***, despite the mess in the kitchen**.
　　　　　Eggplant**, I might add,** *is* my favorite vegetable.

For more comma rules and for examples when commas are not necessary, refer to the "Using Commas" sheet.

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