Main Uses of Commas

1. Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining independent clauses.
   - **Coordinating conjunctions:** FANBOYS (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So)
   - **Independent clauses:** clauses that can stand alone as complete sentences
     - **Examples:**
       - I always do my best, but my sergeant yells at me anyway.
       - Upperclassmen have been through the fourth class system, so they ask knobs to do what they had to do.
       - *Incorrect:* Alisa brought the injured bird home, and fashioned a splint out of popsicle sticks for its wing. (The underlined part of the sentence is a dependent clause and cannot stand on its own, so no comma is necessary.)

2. Use a comma after an introductory word, clause, or phrase.
   - The comma tells the reader the introductory clause or phrase is ending, and the main part of the sentence is beginning.
     - **Examples:**
       - When I returned to the barracks, the upperclassmen were waiting for me.
       - First, our cadre corporal led us to the barber shop for our new haircuts.

   - *Note:* Prepositional phrases of three words or less are not followed by a comma.
     - **Example:** After breakfast we hiked.

3. Use commas to set off nonrestrictive elements in a sentence. Do not use commas to set off restrictive elements.
   - **Nonrestrictive:** describes a noun or pronoun whose meaning has already been defined. Removing the phrase will not dramatically change the meaning of the sentence.
     - **Example:** The dessert, made with fresh raspberries, was delicious.
       - The phrase in bold simply adds some information about a specific dessert.
   - **Restrictive:** defines or limits the meaning of the word it describes and removing it will significantly change the meaning of the sentence.
     - **Example:**
       - The dessert made with fresh raspberries was delicious.
         - This time, the same phrase does not have commas around it, so it tells readers which of two desserts the writer is referring to.
     - **More examples:**
       - Ed’s house, which is located on thirteen acres, was completely furnished with bats in the rafters. (Nonrestrictive)
       - Ramona’s cat that just had kittens became defensive of the other cats in the house. (Restrictive)
       - Darwin’s most important book, *On the Origin of the Species*, was the result of many years of research. (Nonrestrictive)
       - The song “Vertigo” was blasted out of huge amplifiers at the concert. (Restrictive)

4. Use a comma between all items in a series.
   - When three or more items are presented in a series, those items should be separated with commas.
     - **Examples:**
       - I bought books, notepads, and pens for the upcoming semester.
       - My English professor is a kind, funny, intelligent man.
CAUTION! BEWARE OF COMMA SPLICES!

A comma splice occurs when one joins two complete sentences with a comma instead of a period or a semicolon.

- Example: The city had one public swimming pool, it stayed packed with children all summer long.
  - The clauses before and after the underlined comma are both complete sentences that can stand alone. There are several ways to correct this error:
    - Replace the comma with a period and make two separate sentences:
      - The city had one public swimming pool. It stayed packed with children all summer long.
    - Replace the comma with a semicolon:
      - The city had one public swimming pool; it stayed packed with children all summer long.
    - Insert a coordinating conjunction:
      - The city had one public swimming pool, so it stayed packed with children all summer long.