Comma Rule 1: **Use commas to separate parts of dates and addresses.**

If you write at least two parts of a date or address followed by more of the sentence, separate the date/address from the rest of the sentence with a comma as well.

Ex. I live at *3845 Bluebird Lane, Austin, Texas,* in Garden Villa.

I was born on *Monday, April 30, 1984,* at 7:12 P.M.

Comma Rule 2: **Use commas to separate consecutive adjectives that modify the same noun—if they are *interchangeable***. If they can’t be switched, no comma is necessary.

Ex. The pretty girl had *curly, red* hair. OR

The pretty girl had *red, curly* hair.

(These adjectives are interchangeable.)

I’ll have a *juicy chili* hot dog.

(These adjectives are not interchangeable.)

Comma Rule 3: **Use commas to separate words or expressions in a series or list.** These can be nouns, verbs, phrases, or clauses.

Ex. For breakfast I ate *eggs, bacon, hash browns,* and *toast*. (nouns)

We loved *water skiing, boat riding,* and *swimming* in Conroe. (verbs)

The burglar left prints *on the gun, on the floor,* and *on the body*. (phrases)

Teachers have duties *before school starts, after school ends,* and *while students eat lunch*. (clauses)

Comma Rule 4: **Use commas and a conjunction *(and, or, for, nor, but, yet,* or *so)* to separate two independent clauses in a compound sentence.** If you join two of anything else (two things, two people, two actions, two phrases, two clauses, etc.) do not use the comma.

Ex. *I ran all the way to the bus stop*, **but** *the bus had already left*.

(independent clause) (independent clause)

\*My next-door *neighbor* **and** her two first cousins stopped by.

\*We *visited* seventeen states last summer **and** *stayed* in 43 hotels.

\*I cleaned *behind the refrigerator* **and** *underneath the bed*.

\*We arrived at 8:00 *after we went shopping* **and** *before we ate*.

\*Because the conjunctions do not join independent clauses, no commas are needed.

Comma Rule 5: **Use commas after an introduction to your sentence, either a phrase or a clause.**

Note: You do not need a comma after a short (1-3 word) prepositional phrase unless you want the reader to pause there. If your sentence begins with more than one prepositional phrase, put a comma after the last phrase only.

Ex. *After I wash the car*, I have to cut the grass.

(subordinate clause)

*Before the soccer game*, I have to run home.

(long prepositional phrase)

Comma Rule 6: **Use commas to set off introductory words and transitions from the rest of the sentence.** These include many of the adverbs which end in –ly, transitional adverbs (first, next, soon, then, last, later, etc), and interjections (yes,no, well, oh).

Ex. *Timidly*, he crept upstairs.

*Second*, preheat the oven to 350°.

*Well*, I don’t know; what do you think?

*Yes*, I will be going to the party.

Comma Rule7: **Use commas to set off the salutation (Dear Joe,) and the closing (Yours truly,) of any letter.**

Note: Use a colon after the salutation (Dear Sir: ) of a business letter.

Ex. *Dear Sue,*

Can I borrow $5.00 so that I can go to the movies tomorrow night? I’ll be your best friend.

*Yours truly,*

Bill

Comma Rule 8: **Use commas to set off quoted words from the speaker tag in dialogue.**

Note: Commas and periods always go inside the closed quotes (.” Or ,”). Question marks and exclamation marks go inside closed quotes only if the quote itself is a question/exclamation.

Ex. *“Clean your room,”* Mrs. Smith said.

Alisa replied*, “Do I have to?”*

*“If you don’t,”* Mrs. Smith continued*, “you can sit in it all weekend.”*

Comma Rule 9: **Use commas to set off grammatically unnecessary sentence parts (removable “stuff”—if you were to remove these, you would still have a complete sentence).** If the unnecessary sentence part falls in the middle of the sentence, use a comma before and after it.

Ex. Turn the music down, *Sherry*, so I can sleep. (direct address)

Mrs. Bakus, *my English teacher*, is the best! (appositive phrase)

My grandfather, *who lived in Minnesota*, worked as a farmer for many years. (nonessential clause—not needed to identify subject)

The lady *who is my science teacher* is also a coach. (essential clause—needed to identify subject so no comma is needed)

Also unnecessary and requiring commas are the parenthetical expressions, some of which are listed below.

after all for instance of course

at any rate generally speaking on the contrary

by the way I believe (guess, hope, on the other hand

consequently know, feel, etc.) moreover

however in fact nevertheless

for example in my opinion to tell the truth

Ex. The math test, *in fact,* was very long.

*In my opinion*, we should have year-round school.