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.