Common Commas (The 4 Basic Comma Rules: 85-90% of all comma usage)

1 (INTRO)DUCTORY CLAUSES

Rule: Use a comma to offset any grouping of 3+ words coming before the grammatical subject of a sentence. (Exception: Less than 3 words is recommended but not required.)

Structure: *Intro***,** (**S**)ubject (**V**)erb.

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.

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) which are connected by one of these joining words **(For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So) You can only use one coordination conjunction per sentence unless you have a colon or semi-colon.**

Structure: (<u>S₁</u>)ubject (*V₁)erb***, (CC)** <u>S₂</u>)ubject *(V₂)erb*.

Example: <u>The journal article</u> *opened* my eyes**, but** now <u>I</u> *needed* sunglasses.

<u>Paul</u> *baked* cookies**, and** <u>he</u> *shared* them with the rest of us.

<u>I</u> *found* the movie engaging**, so** <u>I</u> *bought* the DVD.

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 a previous word.

Possible Structures: <u>S</u>**, P,** *V*.   **Intro,** <u>S</u> *V*, **P**.   <u>S₁</u> *V₁* **, P,** CC <u>S₂</u> **, P,** *V₂***, P**.

Example: <u>My mom</u>**, the lawyer**, *baked* cookies.

Without a doubt**,** <u>she</u> *excelled***, despite the mess in the kitchen**.

So**,** <u>I</u> *cleaned* the kitchen**, *not my mess*, but** my <u>sister</u>**, *the 10 year old*,** *stole* my cookie**, *totally not cool*.**

4 LISTS OF ITEMS (L1, L2, AND L3…)

List Rule 1: Use commas to separate a (3+) series of equivalent/parallel items, actions, or dependent phrases. (Before the last item, you should include "and"/"or" to show the relationship of the items. The last comma before and/or is recommended to enhance clarity but not required.)

Possible Structures: S V L₁**,** L₂**,** L₃**,** and L₄ . **S=(L1, L2, and L3) V**.

Example: One's writing should be concise, specific, interesting, and engaging.

My professor, my tutor, and my mom agree that my writing is effective.

List Rule 2: Use commas to separate equal adjectives(**A**) that describe the same noun(**N**).

Possible Structures: (A1**,** A2) S V.   S V (A1**,** A2) N.

Example: The sleek, red car sped by.

Suburbans guzzle dirty, expensive gas.

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