Comma Use Within a Sentence

Commas have many uses in sentences, but certain rules guide their placement and meaning. Commas most commonly separate things and assist the reader in identifying significant parts of the sentence and which words go together.

WHEN TO USE COMMAS IN SENTENCES:

1. **Between two *independent clauses connected by a **coordinating conjunction**
    Place a comma before a coordinating conjunction when connecting independent clauses.

    > *EX: The athletes are talented, but the coach is incompetent.*

2. **After introductory words, phrases and clauses**
    The comma signals the end of the introductory part of the sentence. The comma precedes the subject and verb of the independent clause.

    > *EX: In spite of her fear, she jumped into the swirling rapids.*

3. **To set off a beginning subordinate clause from a following main clause**
    A comma between a subordinate clause and an independent clause creates a complete thought.

    > *EX: Because Paul Revere didn't hear his cell phone, the colonists had no warning.*

    > ***Note:** When a subordinate clause follows a main clause, you will generally use no punctuation.*

4. **To set off a transitional statement or an explanation**
    Commas set off the transitional expression, which connects ideas together, from the rest of the sentence.

    > *EX: Most college students, **however**, have high stress levels.*

5. **To separate three or more items in a series**
    Commas separate items in a series, or "list," and act as natural pauses.

    > *EX: The employer was looking for a smart, outgoing, and passionate candidate.*

6. **Between adjectives that can be reversed and connected with "and"**

    > *EX: I drive a slow, ugly, old car.*
    > ***OR**: I drive an ugly, old, slow car.*
    > *OR: I drive a slow, ugly, and old car.*

    > ***Note**: Do not put a comma between the final adjective and modified noun.*

    6a. Adjectives whose order cannot be changed generally are not separated by a comma.

    > *EX: She lives in a big green house.*
    > *NOT: She lives in a green big house. (Since the order cannot be changed, a comma is not needed)*

7. **Before or after quotations**
    Place the comma between a direct quotation and the preceding or following clause.

    > *EX: When asked what he wanted to purchase at the store, he said, "A new computer."*