Five Essential Comma Rules

1. **Use a comma to coordinate independent clauses.**

An independent clause is a group of words that can stand alone as a complete sentence. When using a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) to combine independent clauses, place a comma before the coordinating the conjunction.

- The wind got stronger, and the small boat rocked in the waves.
- Sara wanted to buy milk, but the grocery store was closed.

2. **Use a comma after introductory clauses and phrases.**

Using a comma after introductory information adds clarity and lets readers know that the main part of the sentence is coming.

- After the highway was completed, the town’s population quickly increased.
- Since the 1920s, filmmaking technology has advanced significantly.

Don’t use a comma if the subordinate clauses is at the end of the sentence:

*The town’s population quickly increased after the highway was completed.*

3. **Use a comma to join items in a series.**

A series is a list of three or more items that are all used for the same purpose and in the same grammatical structure.

- The meal includes eggs, bacon, and avocado. *(a series of nouns)*
- She wanted to relax at home, watch TV, and enjoy the game. *(infinitive verb phrases)*
- The dog looked in the trashcan, on the table, and behind the chair. *(prepositional phrases)*

4. **Use a comma after introducing a quotation.**

When introducing a quotation with a phrase, use a comma to separate the writer’s words from the quotation.

- According to Kirszner and Mandall, “Your thesis statement should not include every point you will discuss in your essay” (47).
- Kirszner and Mandall explain, “Revision is not simply a matter of proofreading or editing” (67).

5. **Use commas with transitional words and phrases.**

When using a transitional word or phrase to introduce a sentence, make sure to include a comma to mark where the main clause begins.

- However, Andrew was upset that he couldn’t go to his favorite restaurant.

Use commas to show when a transitional word or phrase is interrupting the normal flow of a sentence.

- His favorite restaurant, on the other hand, always serves him endless amounts of free chips.