

THE COMMA!

A* Use commas to set off introductory words, phrases, and clauses.

In fact, only you can decide.

B* Use commas to separate clauses in compound sentences.

The show started at last, and the crowd grew quiet.

C* Use commas to set off nonrestrictive elements.

The two drivers involved in the accident, *who have been convicted of drunken driving*, should lose their licenses.

D* Use commas to separate items in a series.

Diners had a choice of broccoli, beans, peas, and carrots.

E* Eliminate unnecessary commas.

I don't let my children watch TV shows, that are violent.

"That" restricts the meaning of TV - don't use a comma!

Editing for Commas

Research has shown that five of the most common errors in college writing involve commas. Check your writing for these five errors.

1. Check every sentence that doesn't begin with the subject to see whether it opens with an introductory element (a word, phrase, or clause that describes the subject or tells when, where, how, or why the main action of the sentence occurs). Use a comma to separate an introductory element from the main part of the sentence. (example A)
2. Look at every sentence that contains one of the conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*. If the groups of words before and after the conjunction both function as complete sentences, you have a compound sentence. Make sure to use a comma before the conjunction. (example B)
3. Look at each adjective clause beginning with *which*, *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *when*, or *where* and at each phrase and appositive. Decide whether the element is essential to the meaning of the sentence. If the rest of the sentence would be unclear without it, you should not set off the element with commas. (example C)
4. Identify all adjective clauses beginning with *that*, and make sure they are *not* set off with commas. (examples C and E)
5. Check every *and* and *or* to see whether it comes before the last item in a series of three or more words, phrases, or clauses. Be sure that each item in a series (except the last) is followed by a comma. (example D)

Fun Fact! - Comma-gain?

The comma used before a conjunction (such as "and" or "or") in a list of three or more items is known as the **Oxford Comma**. The phrase "shoes, bags, and hats" is written with an Oxford comma, but "shoes, bags and hats" is not. The term *Oxford Comma* comes from the Oxford University Press, where the use of the comma is standard.