

Commas

Tip 1: Use a comma to separate an **introductory element*** from the **main clause** that follows.

***Introductory Elements** include: prepositional phrases, participle phrases, infinitive phrases, appositives, nouns of direct address, adverbs, subordinate clauses, and speaker tags.



introductory element , main clause

EX: *At midnight in Count Dracula's castle up on the hill, you can hear Diana Ross crooning from the stereo.*

Tip 2: Use commas to set off an **interrupter*** from the sentence that it divides.

***Interrupters** include: prepositional phrases, participle phrases, infinitive phrases, appositives, nouns of direct address, adverbs, subordinate clauses, nonessential clauses, and speaker tags.

first part of the sentence , interrupter , rest of sentence

EX: *My dog, on the other hand, hides under the bed as soon as he hears company knocking at the door.*



Tip 3: Use a comma to separate a **concluding element*** from the main clause that precedes it.

***Concluding elements** include: prepositional phrases, appositives, nouns of direct address, adverbs, subordinate clauses, nonessential clauses, and speaker tags.



main clause , concluding element

EX: *Lisa blew a kiss at Timmy, the shyest boy in the class.*

Tip 4: Know when to use a **comma** with **and***

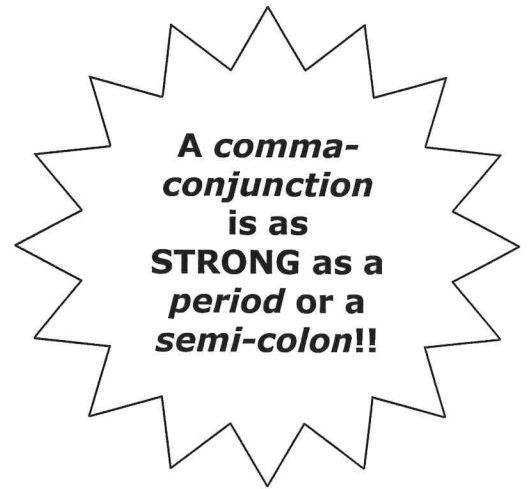
***And** is a **coordinating conjunction**.

Other **coordinating conjunctions** are: **for, nor, but, or, yet, & so**.

Pattern 1: DO use a comma with **and** when joining two main clauses.

main clause , **and** main clause

EX: My dog Floyd sleeps on the bed, and my cat Buster naps in the bathtub.



Pattern 2: Do NOT use a comma with **and** when joining any to units of equal value **except** independent clauses.

unit **and** unit

EX: My dog Floyd has too many fleas **and** too much hair.



Pattern 3: DO use a comma with **and** when listing three or more items in a series (at least in THIS classroom).

item , item , **and** item

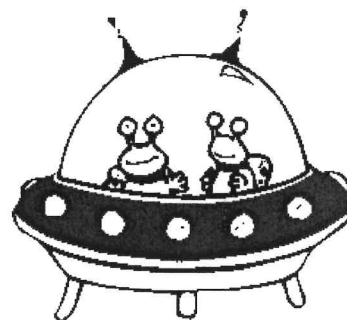
EX: George has bad breath, no money, and an annoying mother.



Tip 5: Use commas to set off **non-essential clauses** that interrupt the main sentence.

NON-ESSENTIAL CLAUSE: additional information that tells more about a word that is *already* specific—like someone’s name.

EX: Robert, **who saw a space ship land in the parking lot**, ran to his class.



ESSENTIAL CLAUSE: additional information that tells more about a word that is *very general*.

EX: The student **who saw a space ship land in the parking lot** ran to his class.



Tip 6: Use commas to separate **equal adjectives**.

How do you know if they’re equal? Test them.

Test 1: Reverse their order. If the sentence still makes sense, they’re equal. Use commas.

EX: The **hungry, slimy, green** Martian opened the classroom door.

Test 2: Say the word **and** in between them. If it sounds okay, then they’re equal. Use commas.

EX: While writing his final exam, a **pale, panicky** student stared at his sentence.

Tip 7: Know the difference between **so** and **so that [so]**.

So is a **coordinating conjunction** just like **and**.

Add it to a comma, and you have a **comma-conjunction**, which is just as strong as a **period**.

Use it to separate two independent clauses. Both of these clauses can stand alone.



main clause , **so** main clause

EX: *Johnny drives an ancient Buick with no air conditioning, **so** he must use the strongest deodorant on the market.*

So that [so] introduces a dependent or subordinate clause.

In other words, even though this clause has both a **subject** and a **verb**, it can't stand alone without leaving the reader hanging.

Sometimes a writer will not include the word **that**, so be careful to notice whether or not the clause can stand alone or not.

main clause **so that** dependent clause

EX: *Mike soaked in a hot bath **so [that]** his aching back would relax.*