Commas

From a reader’s perspective, a comma may be considered a sort of written pause. Proper comma usage depends on a number of conventions. Be careful not to “over-comma.” If it is not needed as per the rules below, just leave it out. The rules below have an “embedded example.”

**Before a coordinating conjunction**
- Use a comma before a FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet and so), but be sure that these conjunctions are not joining a compound noun or verb.

**After an introductory element**
- When a sentence begins with an introductory clause or word, use a comma to show where that introductory element ends and the main clause begins.
- To deal with an infinitive introductory phrase, use a comma.
- Beginning with a participial phrase, not only use a comma, but be sure that the sentence makes sense. Writing proper introductions, commas still can’t write.
- However, you can write, and write well.

**Non-essential elements**
- Phrases which provide additional information, meaning that the clause does not change the meaning of the sentence, require a comma before and after the clause. Be careful to find the right noun to agree with the verb.

**Separate items in a series**
- Three or more items in a series, list, or enumeration are separated by commas, yet it is not uncommon to drop the comma before the last item.
- There is no comma or punctuation between two items joined by a conjunction.

**To separate two or more coordinate adjectives that describe the same noun**
- A coordinate adjective belongs exclusively to the noun. Two coordinate, descriptive adjectives, if reversed, would not make sense. If “and” could fit between the adjective/adverb, there is a comma.
- Never add a comma before the final, descriptive adjective and the noun.

**Parallel Items and Tag Questions**
- Parallel items may be condensed, requiring no conjunction. The more students read, the better they write.
- A comma is required, not preferred.
- Tag questions use a comma, don’t they?

**Before quotations**
- The rule is, “use a comma before the quotation, and put the period before the ending quotation.”

**Appositives**
- Appositives, elements that describe or define a person, place or thing, are set off with commas.

**Relative clauses (using “that”)**
- Elements that are relative do not need commas.

**Geographical names**
- The Woodlands, Texas.

**Dates**
- July 4, 1776