Presents:
The Dirty Dozen Workshop Series
Workshop Two:

Common Comma Rules

One little punctuation mark, so many uses
Why are commas so hard?

Something seems wrong with this picture...
• If you noticed the comma splice in the sign, you’re right on target of what the problem is with the advertisement. More correctly, the sentence could read something like this: *It doesn’t just make you warm. It makes you happy.*

• You also may be getting an idea of why commas can be so tricky: 1) we often see examples of problematic comma usage in everyday life, and 2) commas are unlike any other punctuation mark because they are used for many purposes.
The Pause Rule

• The pause rule—“insert a comma where you would pause during speech”—is a principle you should never use as a guide for when to insert commas.

Wait, why exactly, does the pause rule not work, in writing, I mean?
Rule 1: Commas and Coordinating Conjunctions

• Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction when it joins two independent clauses (two sentences).
• Use FANBOYS to remember this list of coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so.

*Use “, for” only when the word could be replaced with “because” or “since.”
*Use a comma with the FANBOYS “so,” not with the phrase “so that.”

Examples:
I would like to go to Sam’s party on Friday, but I have to work on my paper that’s due on Monday.
I never perform during karaoke, for I’m sure I’ll be laughed off the stage.
My best friend wasn’t home, so I visited with my sister instead.
Rule 2: Commas after Introductory Material

• Use a comma after introductory words, phrases, or dependent clauses when they begin sentences.

Example: To sing the national anthem at this Friday’s game, I must practice not only holding the notes but also remembering words.

• If a sentence begins with “if” or “when,” look for the comma and make sure you have a dependent clause hooked onto an independent one.

Example: When we travel overseas, we must remember to keep our passports in a safe place.

*Remember that some short introductory prepositional phrases can be used without a comma, but using one is okay.
Rule 3: Commas to Separate Items in a List

- Use commas to separate items in a list or a series of items.
- As a rule of thumb, always include the serial comma (a.k.a. Oxford comma).

Examples:

Dave and Maria share hobbies such as photography, choir, and soccer.

He spent his break sitting on the beach, fishing from the pier, and watching all the summer blockbusters.

*Psssst!* The serial comma (a.k.a. Oxford comma) is preferred before the coordinating conjunction.
Rule 4: Commas in Dates, Addresses, and Geographic Locations

• If a date is expressed as month, day, and year in a sentence, a comma is used to separate the day from the year and the year from the remaining portion of the sentence. **Example:** November 8, 1969, was a good day for me.

• If writing an address within a sentence, separate each part of the address with a comma. **No comma** is used between a state and its zip code. **Example:** I stayed with my aunt at 422 Palm Avenue, Apt. 2D, Miami, Florida 66666.

• Always use commas to separate cities from the states in which they are located. **Example:** I drove from Beaufort, North Carolina, to Miami, Florida, in two days.
Rule 5: Direct Address

Use commas when directly addressing someone.

Examples:
I understand, Rachel, that you wish class were canceled today.
I know that is your girlfriend, George.

Mother, please hand me the book.
Rule 6: Common Comma Uses with Quotations

- Use a comma when introducing most quotations. Example: Upon seeing the spider, the guy dropped his books and shouted, “Don’t just stand there, do something!”

- Use commas to set off signal phrases, which can appear at the beginning, middle, or end of a quotation. Example: “What you have here,” the veterinarian joked, “is a failure to salivate.”
Rule 6 Exceptions

• A comma is not needed when the signal phrase follows an **exclamation point** or a **question mark**:

  “Wouldn’t it be nice if we had another week of vacation?” Laura said.

  “Josh!” she called.

• Do not use a comma when using “**that**” before the quotation:

  He suggested **that** “everyone work as a team.”
Rule 6 Exceptions

• Omit the comma when the signal phrase goes straight into the quotation:

Writing clear sentences is very important because it shows “they are performances of a certain skill at the highest level” (Fish, 2011, p. 3).


If the introduction to a quotation can be considered a complete sentence, use a colon to end the sentence, and then start the quotation.

However, to those with the seemingly endless cycle of paper-writing, the crafting of these clear sentences can feel like the punishment of Sisyphus, and professors seem like the mighty gods on Olympus: “They [the gods] had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor” (Camus, 2005).

Rule 7: Commas and Interrupters

- Use commas **before and after** any word, phrase, or clause that can be removed without compromising the grammar, logic, or meaning of the sentence.

Professor Jones, *my history instructor*, dismissed the class early.

I must remember to put both commas.
Rule 8: Commas When Showing Contrast

• Use commas to set off phrases expressing contrast.

Examples:
The students in English 207, not the professor, insisted on reviewing commas.
Joseph, unlike Monica, speaks seven languages.
This is my book bag, not yours.
Rule 9: Commas and adjectives

• Use a comma between two or more adjectives when the adjectives equally modify the same word.

*Here’s how to test if you need a comma:* If the phrase still makes sense when you 1) reverse the order of the adjectives and 2) insert the conjunction “and” between the adjectives, then add a comma. Otherwise, a comma is not appropriate.
Where could the comma go?

Lloyd dreamed of owning a sleek shiny muscle car.

Kirk has two metal rods in his leg.
This is how we test where to put the comma:
Which words could be reversed?
Also, could the word “and” be inserted between two adjectives?
Therefore...

Lloyd dreamed of owning a sleek, shiny muscle car.
Kirk has two metal rods in his leg.

In this example, reversing the wording of the adjectives will impact the logic of the sentence. Additionally, there is not a place where “and” could be inserted.

Therefore, no comma is needed.
Rule 10: Commas and Clarity

• Use commas for clarity, to prevent the reader of your paper from not being able to clearly understand what you mean.

Examples:
For Mary, Margaret would walk barefooted through a desert of broken glass.
Soon after, the storm clean-up began.
Prospero’s magical feats arise from his personal desires, as seen in the storm at the beginning of the play.
In *The Tempest’s* wild setting, with more nature-based spirits, such formal scholarship would seem out of place.
A. Because she insisted, Max let Mary treat him to dinner.

B. Because she insisted Max let Mary treat him to dinner.

Which of the following sentences is punctuated correctly?
A. Because she insisted, Max let Mary treat him to dinner.

Why? Rule #2—Use a comma after introductory words, phrases, or dependent clauses when they begin sentences. “Because she insisted” is a dependent clause at the beginning of the sentence; therefore, a comma is needed to separate the dependent clause from the main sentence (the independent clause).
A. The small cramped car made the drive to the beach very uncomfortable.
B. The small, cramped car made the drive to the beach very uncomfortable.

Which of the following sentences is punctuated correctly?
A. The small cramped car made the drive to the beach very uncomfortable.

INCORRECT

B. The small, cramped car made the drive to the beach very uncomfortable.

Why? Because the words “small” and “cramped” can be reversed and because the word “and” could be inserted in between them, a comma is necessary to separate the two adjectives modifying the noun “car.”
Because many people use air conditioning during the summer.

In the following pairs, one sentence is correct and one sentence is incorrect. Choose the complete sentence or sentences.

A. She texted her mom the date and time of the play so that her mom wouldn’t forget to attend.
B. She texted her mom the date and time of the play, so that her mom wouldn’t forget to attend.

Which of the following sentences is punctuated correctly?
A. She texted her mom the date and time of the play so that her mom wouldn’t forget to attend.

B. She texted her mom the date and time of the play, so that her mom wouldn’t forget to attend.

**Why?** Commas are not needed when using the phrase “so that.” A comma is used with so when they are used in connecting two complete sentences: You’ll hit my sore knee if you throw that, so put the baseball down now.
For the Fun of it

With the Oxford Comma:
We invited the rhinoceri, Washington, and Lincoln.

Without the Oxford Comma:
We invited the rhinoceri, Washington and Lincoln.
For the Fun of it

• Man bacon makes everything taste better.
• I like cooking dogs and my family.
• Time to eat kids.
• Woman without her man is nothing.
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