**Commas: Placing Words in a Series**

When you have three or more items in a series, you must include a comma after every item up to the next to the last. Your elements in the series should be in **parallel form**: all the same parts of speech, same type of phrase, or the same type of clause. If the items in your series include clauses that contain punctuation, you should use **semicolons** between the elements in the series in order to avoid confusing the reader.

1. **One Word Items –** should all be the **same** part of speech
2. The fall foliage decorated the mountain side with beautiful reds, yellows, oranges, and browns.
3. **Clauses or Phrases –** when using a list, all of its parts must grammatically fit into the sentence
4. While his goals were honorable, the project failed because he refused to take into consideration the specific culture of the people, the lack of participation from the university, the limited amount of funds, or the extreme distance from his home.
5. He failed to take into consideration the specific culture of the people
6. He failed to take into consideration the lack of participation from the university
7. He failed to take into consideration the limited amount of funds
8. He failed to take into consideration the extreme distance he would have to travel.
9. **Clauses Containing Punctuation**
10. In order to be successful in college, the students must read their assignments, take notes in their classes, and attend class regularly; they must form, maintain, and expand their support systems; and they must get plenty of exercise, rest, and nutrition.
    1. Use semicolons between the elements in the series in order to avoid confusing the reader.
       1. Note: In the above example: each of the phrases contains a series in which the members of the series are separated by commas; in order to avoid confusion, notice the writer’s use of the semicolon after each phrase.
11. Doris Smith, a homemaker from Winslow; John Doe, a tractor retailer from Benton; and Harold Law, a preacher from Tupelo attended the reunion.
    * 1. Note: In the example above, each of the members of the series has a comma that follows with additional information, so the writer uses semicolons in the sentence to avoid confusion.

**Commas: Dates, Addresses, Titles, and Numbers**

Use commas to separate items in dates, addresses, titles, and numbers in order to clarify their meaning.

1. **Dates** – place a comma between the day of the week and the month, and between the day of the month and the year, and between the year and the rest of the sentence.
2. **Addresses** – always have a comma after each part of the address. The one exception to this rule is the space between the state and zip/postal code.
3. **Titles** – use commas after names and the titles and after titles and the rest of the sentence.
4. **Numbers** – use a comma with three or greater digits, placing the comma between each three digits starting from the right.

**Commas: Separating Two or More Coordinating Adjectives**

Coordinating adjectives carry equal relationship to the noun; they modify the noun, not each other.

1. **Determine** the status of the adjectives by the following:
2. If you reverse the order of the adjectives, does the sentence still make sense? If yes, then you should place a comma because they are equal.
   * **Example:** The narrow, rough, slick highway should be avoided
   * You can rearrange the adjectives and the sentence will still make sense
3. Will the sentence still make sense if you place “and” between each adjective? If so, still place a comma between each adjective
   * **Example**: The narrow *and* rough *and* slick highway should be avoided
   * The sentence above still makes perfect sense
4. **Determine** whether adding “and” changes the meaning of the sentence. If so, you should remove the comma because it could mislead the reader
5. **Example:** Juan owns a yellow, cotton shirt
   * If you rewrite this sentence “Juan owns a yellow and cotton shirt” could mislead readers by making it seem as if Juan owns two different shirts, not one shirt that is both yellow and made of cotton

**Commas Separating Contrasting Elements, Tag Question, and Interjections**

Commas are used for clarity, and in order to maintain clarity, there are specific rules for comma usage. When using contrasting elements, tag questions, and interjections, commas are required in order to increase the clarity of your sentence.

1. **Contrasting Element:** Placing a comma at the end of a sentence in order to separate the sentence from its contrasted coordinate element.
2. The children were hungry, not despondent.
3. On long car trips, it was the adults, not the children, who demanded frequent stops.
4. **Tag Question:** You may also place the comma between the sentence and a tag question.
5. You have taken French, haven’t you?
6. He sounded professional, didn’t he?
7. **Interjections:** Interjections are words or phrases that interrupt the flow of the sentence and always require a comma.
8. The committee did, in fact, vote for a new president.
9. Remember, children, to get your permission slips signed.