Commas help to clarify relationships between sentence elements and facilitate understanding. Unnecessary and inappropriate commas can disrupt a sentence’s meaning or even confuse the reader.

1. **Do not use a comma if it separates the subject and verb, or the verb and its complement.**
   a. Example: I wanted to leave him.
   b. NOT: I, wanted to leave him. And NOT: I wanted, to leave him.

2. **Do not use a comma before part of a compound structure that is not a complete independent clause.**
   a. Example: Her new car was sporty looking and creates a distinguished look.
   b. NOT: Her new car was sporty looking, and creates a distinguished look.

3. **Do not use a comma after a coordinating conjunction (**and, but, or, nor, so, for, yet**) connecting two independent clauses, **but before it.**
   a. Example: I went to the store, and she went to the movies.
   b. NOT: I went to the store and, she went to the movies.

4. **Do not use a comma between two independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction. Use either a period and a capital letter or a semicolon instead.**
   a. Example: We went to the beach; they went to work.
   b. NOT: We went to the beach, they went to work.

5. **Comma use may be optional when the independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction are short, but you are never wrong to use a comma.**

6. **Do not use a comma before the first element of a series.**
   a. Example: I bought beans, fish, and bananas at the grocery store.
   b. NOT: I bought, beans, fish, and bananas at the grocery store.

7. **Do not use a comma or commas to separate an independent clause from a following dependent clause introduced by after, before, because, if, since, unless, until, or when (no comma, whether before or after the subordinating conjunction).**
   a. Example: I went to class after the writing center.
   b. NOT: I went to class, after the writing center.

8. **Do not use a comma before a clause beginning with that or following a such as statement.**
   a. The dress that she wore to the wedding was beautiful.
   b. The dress, that she wore to the wedding was beautiful.
8. **Do not use a comma or commas to set off essential (restrictive) information.**
   a. Example: The boy who broke the window is at the door.
   b. NOT: The boy, who broke the window, is at the door.

10. **Do not use commas in years, street numbers, zip codes, telephone numbers, or page numbers.**

The following style guides and handbooks were consulted for this handout:


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