Commas

Only use commas when you know exactly why you are using them.

**When Should I Use Commas?**

1: **Before coordinating conjunctions** (and, but, for, or, nor, so, and yet) when these words connect two complete sentences.
   - *I may be crazy, but I love the rain.*
   - *I did not hear her, and she would not repeat herself.*  

2: **Between items listed in a series** (individual words, phrases, dependent clauses). Use a comma before the coordinating conjunction and last item of the series unless you are writing a newspaper article.
   - *My grocery list includes chocolate chips, soda, and Swiss cheese.*
   - *I escaped from the car, dodged a pole, leapt over a fence, and disappeared into the woods.*

3: **After introductory clauses or phrases in a sentence.** Subordinate conjunctions (before, since, because, etc.), prepositions (in, on, after, etc.), and verbals (running, ignored, etc.) at the beginning of sentences are signal words for introductory material.
   - *Since Tim fetched her coffee, Stella was not as crabby.*
   - *When Brian buried the murder victim, Annie helped.*
   - *Fleeing from the law, Paul felt free.*

4: **To enclose or set off** transitional or explanatory words and nonessential phrases, clauses, or appositives that interrupt the sentence structure.
   a. *I, however, never eat uncooked squirrel meat.*  
      (transitional word)
   b. *Her only recourse, besides hiding, was to run.*  
      (nonessential phrase)
   c. *Ms. Ely, who hated laughter, cancelled the party.*  
      (nonessential clause)
   d. *Bob, my angry neighbor, hates everyone.*  
      (nonessential appositive)

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**Complete Sentences**
A complete sentence expresses a complete thought and contains a subject and a verb. Many sentences involving commas modify or expand upon a complete sentence.

**Nonessential Phrases**
A nonessential phrase may also occur at the end of a sentence, after the main clause (complete sentence) is expressed.
5: To separate parts of dates, addresses, or geographical names.
   ▪ The aliens invaded on November 7, 1980.
   ▪ 1357 West Maple, Salem, Oregon, is where the zombies will strike.

6: To separate what is being said from the person(s) being addressed.
   ▪ Darling, please shut up.
   ▪ Judy, stop teasing your brother.
   ▪ Please, Warren, leave the ferret alone!

7: To enclose explanatory words that introduce, interrupt, or conclude a direct quotation.
   ▪ I said, “I don’t care how old he is!”
   ▪ “Excuse me,” she replied, “but he is 87 years old.”
   ▪ “And I refuse to marry him,” she added.

8: To separate two or more coordinate adjectives modifying the same noun or pronoun. Adjectives are coordinate if they can be rearranged without changing the meaning and if the word ‘and’ can be inserted between them without changing the meaning.
   ▪ My boyfriend is an intelligent, creative liar. (My boyfriend is an intelligent and creative liar.)
   ▪ My boyfriend is a creative, intelligent liar.