The Comma Rules – Taught by: Michael Plasmeier

Introduction

- The comma is a valuable, useful punctuation device because it separates the structural elements of sentences into manageable segments.
- "comma" comes directly from the Greek komma, which means "something cut off" or "a short clause".
- The rules provided here are those found in traditional handbooks; however, in certain rhetorical contexts and for specific purposes, these rules may be broken.

Before Coordinating Conjunctions for Compound Sentences

- Use comma before an coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
- Used to connect two independent clauses in a compound sentence
- Ex: Joe has seven chickens, but Jack has three.
- Ex: I asked you to repeat that, yet you didn't.

Set off an Introductory Phrase or Clause

- Introductory clauses are dependent clauses that provide background information or "set the stage" for the main part of the sentence, the independent clause. For example:
- If they want to win, athletes must exercise every day. (introductory dependent clause, main clause)
- Because he kept barking insistently, we threw the ball for Smokey. (introductory dependent clause, main clause)
- Clue: Introductory clauses start with adverbs like after, although, as, because, before, if, since, though, until, when, etc.
- (We call this a complex sentence)

Important Exception

- Ex: Because she fell, she was late to class.
- Don't put a comma when the dependent clause comes after the independent clause
- Ex: She was late for class, because she fell.
- Instead: She was late for class because she fell.

Transition/Introductory Words and Phrases

- Use a comma to set off transition words from the rest of the sentence
- Common introductory phrases that should be followed by a comma include participial and infinitive phrases, absolute phrases, nonessential appositive phrases, and long prepositional phrases (over four words).
- Ex: Unfortunately, there is no free lunch
- Ex: I don't want to take the test, however, I need to.

Set off an Appositives and Parenthetical Phrases