Bracken Business Communications Clinic

PUNCTUATION

THE COMMA (,)

A sentence is punctuated with a period, which appears at the end of the sentence.
Within a sentence, one may encounter other forms of punctuation: **commas,** semi-colons, and colons.

Commas **separate items** and **enclose** or **set off items** from the main content of a sentence. A misplaced comma can change the intended meaning of a sentence. Commas are also used after a phrase introducing a short quote.

TO SEPARATE ITEMS

Use commas to separate
- 3 or more nouns, phrases, or clauses in a series.
- 2 or more adjectives in a series that modify the same noun (2 or more "coordinate" adjectives).

  Note: Use a comma before *and* to clarify the last or final item in a series is a separate item. Known as the Oxford comma, it prevents unintended misstatements.

  e.g., The job required answering phones, cleaning and serving customers.
  Unclear : Here, the job required cleaning customers.

  The job required answering phones, cleaning, and serving customers.
  Clear : The comma clarifies that cleaning does not refer to customers.

- introductory words, phrases, or commands from the rest of the sentence.

  e.g., Yes, please call.
  Please remember, all papers are due tomorrow.
  Unfortunately, our speaker will be late.

- independent clauses (clauses that can stand on their own) that are joined by a conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*).

  e.g., The pitcher threw the ball quickly to first base, but the base runner was safe.
  The pilots fly the plane, and the flight attendants oversee in-flight safety.
  The computer screens were not delivered, so we were all unhappy.

Do <u>not</u> use a comma to separate
- the 2 parts of a compound predicate: one single subject and 2 predicates. A predicate consists of a verb or a word group containing a verb that describes what the subject does.

  e.g., He made a peanut butter sandwich and ate it before leaving the house. (no comma)
  Jane wrote the letter and mailed it immediately. (no comma)

TO ENCLOSE AND SET OFF ITEMS

A pair of commas works like a pair of parentheses.

Use commas to enclose and set off
- nonessential phrases: phrases that may enhance meaning, but are not essential to the meaning or the grammatical structure of the sentence.
  - e.g., We can review the meeting agenda over breakfast or, if your time is limited, over the phone.

- a phrase that interrupts the flow of the sentence.
  - e.g., Her new book is better written, though less thrilling, than her last book.
    Taking a bus is the cheapest, though not the fastest, way to get there.

- an appositive (a modifying phrase used to identify a noun).
  - e.g., MSU, located in the Gallatin Valley of Montana, has a great football team.
    Jane, president of the student advisory club, introduced the speaker.

NEVER use a comma
- to separate a subject and its predicate (verb) in a sentence.
  - e.g.,The distinguished professor of accounting, looked on as her student received the award.
    Incorrect: No comma after "professor of accounting."

    The person we plan to hire for the new position is Sara Bellum.
    Correct: No comma after "is."

    Anyone who contributes will earn intangible rewards.
    Correct: Here, a noun clause is the subject, so there is no comma after "anyone who contributes."

- to connect two independent clauses when there is no conjunction.
  - e.g., Complete the writing assignment by Friday, I must have it corrected by Monday.
    Incorrect: Here, the coma creates a run on sentence.

    Complete the writing assignment by Friday. I must have it corrected by Monday.
    Correct : Make 2 sentences and use a period to punctuate both sentences.