**The Comma**

**Rule #1: Conjunctions**

When a coordinating conjunction connects two or more independent clauses - word groups that could stand alone as separate sentences - a comma must precede it. There are seven conjunctions in English: *and, but, or, nor, for, so,* and *yet.*

A comma tells readers that one independent clause has come to an end and that another is about to begin.

Ex: Nearly everyone has heard of love at first sight, but I fell in love at first dance.

**Rule #2: Introductory word groups**

Most common introductory word groups tell when, where, how, why, or under what conditions the main action of the sentence occurred.

Ex: When Irwin was ready to eat, his cat jumped onto the table.

Ex: Near a small stream at the bottom of the canyon, we discovered an abandoned shelter.

**Rule #3: Items in a series**

When three or more items are presented in a series, those items should be separated from one another with commas. Items in a series may be single words, phrases, or clauses.

Ex: For breakfast the children ordered cornflakes, English muffins with peanut butter, and apple juice.

**Rule #4: Appositives**

An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun.

Ex: New Liskeard, a small Northern Ontario town, is part of Temiskaming Shores.

**Rule #5: Dates, addresses, titles, and numbers**

In dates, the year is set off from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas. Commas are not needed if the date is inverted or if only the month and year are given.

Ex: On July 2, 1885, Big Bear was arrested.

Ex: January 1994 was an extremely cold month.

With addresses, the elements of an address or place name are followed by commas. A postal code, however, is not preceded by a comma.

Ex: John Lennon was born in Liverpool, England, in 1940.

Ex: Please send the package to Greg Tarvin at 5321 3rd Avenue, Delta, British Columbia V4M 1B8.

**Rule #6: Prevent confusion**

In certain contexts, a comma is necessary to prevent confusion. If the writer has omitted a word or phrase, for example, a comma may be needed to signal the omission.

Ex: To run in the hallways is not permitted; to walk, fine.

In this case, the comma replaces the word *is*.

If two words in a row echo each other, a comma may be needed for ease of reading.

Ex: All of the catastrophes that we had feared might happen, happened.

Sometimes a comma is needed to prevent readers from grouping words in ways that do not match the writer’s intention.

Ex: Patients who can, walk up and down the halls several times a day.

*Exercise A: Insert the commas in the following sentences.*

*Hint: The number at the end of the sentence indicates the numbers of commas needed.*

1. Montgomery the man you met yesterday is quite nice and we’re hoping for him to visit tomorrow. (3)
2. Jonathan was born on August 4th, 1980, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. (3)
3. Please go to the store and buy apples peanut butter salt & vinegar chips sour patch kids and some Diet Coke. (4)
4. Jean-Guy LeJack, the world’s foremost connoisseur on all things related to lumberjacks, will be visiting the area on Saturday, March 11th, but I will miss him since I will be in Hawaii from March 9th to March 17th. (4)
5. When I get home this evening I plan on taking a hot shower getting into my comfiest sweatpants watching Netflix for 4 straight hours and eating an entire tub of ice cream. (4)