Comma Use

1. To set off **introductory dependent clauses**. These clauses are usually introduced by such subordinating conjunctions as **IF, ALTHOUGH, SINCE, WHEN, WHILE, and BECAUSE**.

   Even though we did not make a large profit, we made many friends.  
   When you plan your next trip, stop at any one of our downtown stores.

   **NOTE:** When the **main clause** precedes the **dependent clause**, no comma is needed.

   **No comma needed:**
   Stop at any of our downtown stores when you plan your next trip.  
   She plans to secure a stenographer’s position after she graduates in June.

2. To set off **introductory infinitive and participial phrases**.

   To succeed in any occupation, one must secure the necessary qualifications.  
   To qualify for a discount, you must pay your bill within ten days.  
   Having finished most of her work, she went to lunch.

   **NOTE:** A phrase that immediately follows the word it modifies is not set off unless it is non-restrictive (see item 7).

   He liked to hear the rain *pattering on the roof*.

3. To set off **introductory prepositional phrases that are long**.

   In your reply to this letter, please quote the price of your paint.  
   In view of the new research in this field, we thought you would be interested in a complete course.

   **NOTE:** Some writers favor the use of the comma after most prepositional phrases unless they are **short** and designate a specific time or place.

   In each issue we try to keep our friends posted on what is new in equipment.
4. To separate **two independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction**.

   A checking account will save you time in paying bills, *and* it will give you definite proof that payments have been made.
   I was sorry to hear this, *for* I especially wanted Mr. Brown to see the plan.

**NOTE:** Do not place a comma before the conjunction in a compound predicate.

   We used the machine for ten days *and* returned it to you in good condition.

5. To set off **nouns of direct address**.

   We hope, *Mr. Long*, that we may have the pleasure of serving you soon.
   *Ms. Thompson*, your suggestion is an excellent one.

6. To set off **parenthetical words, phrases, and clauses**.

   You must, *therefore*, act quickly if you wish to take advantage of this price.
   This book tells you, *among other things*, how to save money on utilities.
   You will find, *I am sure*, that it will take an effective advertising medium.

7. To set off **nonrestrictive relative clauses**. A **nonrestrictive clause** adds an idea which may be descriptive but is not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

   Our company, *which has been in business since February 1908*, has made very little paper of this type.
   This pad, *which has your name embossed in gold*, will be sent free of charge.

8. To set off **words, phrases, or short clauses in a series**.

   This filter will remove *dust, dirt, and grime* from the oil.
   Lengthy explanations are sometimes confusing, often irritating, and usually unnecessary.

9. To set off **words used in apposition**.

   An office friend, *Mr. Ralph Linder*, is purchasing a new car this spring.
   Your task is simplified if you have a map of Cincinnati, *her hometown*.

10. To **introduce an informal quotation**.
Please take a minute and write us a note saying, "Send us a complete list of samples and prices."
"Get production started," said Mr. Brown, "before we lose that order."

**NOTE:** When the quotation is long and formal, a colon may be used.
Dr. Hairston always uses encouraging words when talking about the writing process: "Effective writers expect to get new insights as they work; they know that writing is an act of discovery, and they develop their ideas by writing."

11. After such **introductory expressions** as yet, no, well, certainly, indeed, really, and **surely**.

   *Certainly*, the order should have been processed early last week.
   *Well*, our new supply certainly should be here in another week or so.

12. To set off **addresses and dates**.

   Please write our local dealer, **The Office Supply Company, 664 W. Main Street, Waco, Texas.**
   You will find it a pleasure to deal with our bank, which was opened on **April 22, 1902**, and which has been serving the public ever since.

13. After **that is, for example, namely**, etc., when used to introduce examples or other explanatory material.

   This bed comes in all types of wood -- **for example**, stained walnut, oiled cherry, and unfinished pine.

14. To set off **contrasted expressions**.

   It was the sporting goods, **not the hardware**, that they reduced in price.

15. To indicate **omission of a word or words** (in the following example, the phrase *the Mailing Department mailed* is implied for February and March rather than repeated).

   The Mailing Department mailed 784 packages in January, 713 in February, and 814 in March.

16. To set off a **declarative statement from a short question** relating to it.

   *Mr. Arnold gave my message to Mr. Ward, didn't he?*
17. To **divide two identical words or two unrelated numbers**.

I told *you, you* should always wear gloves when gardening. In *1947*, *733* new members were added to the Association.

18. After a **mild interjection**.

*Well*, it will be difficult to break this year’s record.

19. To set off **thousands** in figures containing four digits or more, *except* in serial numbers, such as house, page, policy, telephone, and year numbers.

1,726  729,500  page 1136  2746 North Avenue  Policy No. 6206119