6 Reasons to Use a Comma

Commas that Join…

1. **Independent Clauses into a Compound Sentence**
   - Put a comma before a conjunction *and, but, for, so, or, yet* only if each side of the sentence could stand by itself as a complete sentence.
     - Most people think the tomato is a vegetable, but it is actually a fruit.
   - Do not use a comma if either side of the sentence is not capable of being a complete sentence on its own.
     - The director worked late into the night but didn’t come in the next day.

Commas that Separate…

2. **Introductory Words or Phrases**
   - Use a comma after an introductory word or phrase that comes before the main clause of the sentence (the subject and predicate).
     - Typically, cats have a strict hygiene regiment.
     - Even with the fresh coat of paint, the house looked drab.
     - When I came home to a clean house, I was astonished.
     - Mr. Johnson, I’ve been to this office before.
     - Oh, I was exhausted.

3. **Asides**
   - Use a comma to separate an aside that is thrown into middle of a sentence as long as they interrupt the main clause and are not essential to the meaning of the sentence.
     - Jasmine, who won an award last year, was the first student to get an internship.
     - This question, I’m sure we would all agree, was extremely difficult to answer.
     - The librarian, who has brown hair, is very helpful. [non-essential clause]
   - But not in…
     - The librarian who has brown hair is very helpful. [essential clause – in this case, we need to know her hair color]

4. **Items in a List/Series**
   - When listing 3 or more things (words, phrases, or clauses), put a comma after all but the last one.
     - I brought a sandwich, an apple, and a cookie.
     - The guest speaker spoke about mental health issues, demonstrated a strategy for counseling patients, and led in a discussion about medical ethics.
     - The tent had a leak, the food had gone bad, and our clothes were soaked.
   - When listing 2 or more coordinate adjectives (adjectives that could be switched around), put a comma in between them.
     - It was a dim, soggy day.

5. **A Quote from the Rest of the Sentence**
   - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

6. **Addresses, Place names, Dates**
   - Send correspondence to Bowie State University, 14000 Jericho Park Rd., Bowie, MD 20715.
   - The delegates met in Annapolis, Maryland.
   - The law was passed on June 3, 1958.

*If it’s not one of the scenarios above, it does not need a comma.*