# Commas Gone CRAZY!

I'm seeing SPOTS before my eyes, little spots with tails. They're everywhere; then they're nowhere. I need to file for Workmen's Compensation. It's a workplace affliction. It's a comma affliction; for some, a comma addiction. Those little spots are driving me CRAZY!

OK . That was cathartic. I'm feeling better now. Nevertheless, I realize that my only hope is an ultimate cure. Not mine. Yours. I must cure your comma misuse. I divide you into two groups—those of you who LOVE the little swirly commas and those who avoid them at all costs. So as not to overtax anyone's brain, here are the Jones' Comma Rules:

#### Rule #1: Separate items in a series of three or more with commas.

Commas are friendly, and they like to flock in groups of three of more (unless there's another sentence around, see Rule #4 below). Yes, they **do** LOVE to HUG those conjunctions—and, but, or, nor—so put a comma in front of them also.

#1 #2 #3

3 nouns: Labradors, golden retrievers, and poodles are America's favorite dogs.

#1 #2 #3

3 verbs: On weekdays I hate to clean, grade, or garden.

#1 #2 #3

3 phrases: Washing clothes, running errands, and doing house repairs are also on my

list of weekend dislikes.

# Rule #2: Commas follow an introductory "anything".

OK, let's back up here a little ways. Before you can introduce something, you have to have something there in the first place. The basis of all spoken language is the sentence, and the English language only has five basic sentence patterns. That's it. Just five [5]. That's the "something" that must be in place first—the sentence. It doesn't make any difference what kind of sentence it is, just any one of the five sentence patterns. For those who must know, here's what those patterns are:

S — V[Subject —Verb] Example: The baby slept.

S — V — DO [Subject —Verb—Direct Object] Example: The girl lost her balloon.

S — V — IO — DO [Subject — Verb—Indirect Object — Direct Object]

Example: My mother baked me a chocolate birthday cake.

S —LV — PN [Subject —Linking Verb—Predicate Nominative] S LV PN

Example: Mrs. Jones is the coolest teacher in the world.

S —LV—PA [Subject —Linking Verb—Predicate Adjective]

Example: Smokers' breath smells bad.

#### Rule #2 — continued

So here's how this rule applies: If you put any grammatical structure in front of the basic sentence structure, you must separate the introductory structure away from the sentence structure using a COMMA.

## **Introductory PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE [two or more]:**

On one of the first days in spring, Jessica walked to class with her best friend.

## **Introductory PARTICIPIAL PHRASE:**

Running down the main staircase. Jessica tripped on her flip flops.

#### **Introductory SUBORDINATE [ADVERB] CLAUSE:**

When she landed at the bottom of the stairs, Jessica realized the hottest guy in school was reaching out his hand to help her up.



CAUTION! If you don't know what the subordinate conjunctions are, now is the time to learn, or this rule will be hard to follow. See box at end for these words.

#### **Introductory ADVERB:**

Luckily, all that was hurt was her pride.

#### **Introductory INTERJECTION:**

Wow, he's hot! The thought raced through her mind.

#### **Introductory DIRECT ADDRESS:**

"Jessica, are you hurt?" the hottie asked.

#### **Introductory TRANSITION:**

In conclusion, it's a truth of life that the best things happen at the worst times.

Rule #3: Always use a comma before an adjective clause that starts with which. Never use a comma before an adjective clause that starts with that.

> Why? The grammar gods have decided that which introduces a clause that is unnecessary [also called nonrestrictive], so the comma(s) show that the clause can be left out. The relative pronoun that introduces a necessary [also called restrictive] clause so you can't use comma(s). What about who, whose and whom? You decide. If it's necessary [don't use commas] or unnecessary [use commas]. Kind of backwards thinking, I've always thought. Or think of it like this. The commas form little handles that allow you to pick up the clause and throw it out because it is not needed, not necessary, to the meaning of the sentence.

**Example of that:** The movie that I wanted to see is no longer playing at Highlands

Ranch.

The Platte River, which once was heavily polluted, serves as the **Example of which:** 

focal point for the Hudson Gardens' nature walk.

Rule #4: Separate compound sentences with a comma, placing the comma before the conjunction.

So what's a compound sentence, you ask. What's a conjunction? A compound sentence is two or more sentences connected with a conjunction. An easy way to remember the conjunctions is with the acronym FANBOYS. F = for, A = and, N = nor, B = but, O = or, Y = yet, S = so.

Example: Englewood is my home town, and it is also the corporate headquarters for Sports Authority.

Check it: There's one sentence to the left of the comma and one sentence to the right of the comma. Also, the conjunction and immediately follows the comma.



What happens if there is a comma but no conjunction? That is a major no-no according to the grammar gods. It's called a comma splice. The solution: If you have two sentences together in one sentence with no conjunction, use a semi-colon to separate the two sentences.

Example of semi-colon: Englewood is my home town; it is also the corporate headquarters for Sports Authority.

Rule #5: Separate interrupters from the rest of the sentence with commas. Use a comma before and after if the interrupter comes in the middle of the sentence.

What are interrupters? An interrupter is anything that interrupts the flow of the sentence or that breaks up the main pattern of the sentence [see Rule #2].

TRANSITION as interrupter

College, on the other hand, expects students to be independent learners.

**DIRECT ADDRESS as interrupter** 

Are you listening, David, to what I am saying?

PARTICIPIAL PHRASE as interrupter

Randy Penn, serving currently as Englewood city councilman, grows irises for relaxation.

**APPOSITIVE** as interrupter

Sheila Jones, Pirateer adviser, will be the featured speaker at the summer journalism conference.

MISCELLANEOUS, UNNECESSARY WORDS as interrupter

My lost cell phone, as luck would have it, was lying just outside my car door where I had dropped it.

Rule #6: Separate the speaker of a quotation from the quote with a comma. In a split quote, separate a partial quote with commas. If the second part of the split quote is a complete sentence, separate the two parts of the quote with a period. Remember, in most cases, the punctuation goes to the LEFT of the quotation marks.

Example: Mrs. Jones said, "Separate the speaker of the quote from the quote with a comma."

Split quote #1: "Commas can be confusing," Mrs. Jones said, "so it's important to learn the rules.

Note: This split quote is one compound sentence separated with commas.

Split quote #2: "Students make too many mistakes with commas," Mrs. Jones said. "It's important that they learn the rules, so they don't continue to drive me crazy."

Note: This split quote is two complete, separate sentences. Therefore, it is separated with a period after the speaker of the quote.

For Rule #2: Subordinate Conjunctions:			Memorize these!		
After As if	Since In order that When Wherever	Before Even though As As soon as	So that Although Until	Whenever Unless Where	As long as While Though