

**THE GOOF-UP**  
**RULE #2: Overusing and Abusing Commas**

**GOOF-PROOF!**

*Commas are used to separate different parts of sentences. Here are the five basic rules for using commas:*

1. *To set off nonessential clauses*
2. *To set off sentence interrupters*
3. *To separate joined sentences*
4. *To set apart a series of words being presented as a group*
5. *To set off introductory sentence parts*

Let's look at each rule individually:

**1. Use a comma to set off nonessential clauses.**

**A nonessential clause** is one **that** can be removed from a sentence without changing the sentence's meaning. For example:

Denise's boyfriend, *who is active in a local theater group*, is a manager at the coffee shop.

If you remove the highlighted clause from the sentence, the basic meaning remains the same. This is because the clause is nonessential. See how the basic meaning is the same without the nonessential clause:

Denise's boyfriend is a manager at the coffee shop.

**2. Use a comma to set off sentence interrupters.**

A **sentence interrupter** is a sort of nonessential clause. It can be removed from the sentence without changing the basic meaning. For example:

Timothy, *however*, will attend a community college in the fall.

Take out the **highlighted** interrupter and the basic meaning stays the same:

Timothy will **attend** a community college in the fall.

Some examples of sentence interrupters are:

- additionally
- as a rule
- consequently
- for example
- hopefully
- however
- if possible
- in addition
- in any event
- in conclusion
- in summary
- on the **contrary**
- on the other **hand**
- therefore

### 3. Use a comma to separate joined sentences.

When you have two complete sentences combined into one by the use of *and*, *but*, or *or* you should put a comma in front of the *and*, *but*, or *or*.

We went to the concert, and we had a great time.

Peter missed his family, but he was determined to stay at school through the end of the semester.

You can have chocolate ice cream, or you can have a dish of vanilla pudding.

### 4. Use a comma to set apart a series of words being presented as a group.

This is known as the **serial comma**. It is used when you have a series of words and the last word is preceded by *and*. Each word in a series should be separated by a comma. For example:

I traveled to Europe with Ryan, Michelle, Brooke, Irwin, and Lucille.

We visited England, France, Spain, and Italy.

### 5. Use a comma to set off introductory sentence parts.

An **introductory sentence part** can be a word, a phrase, or a clause. A comma is used to separate the introductory part from the main part of the sentence in order to clarify meaning. Here are examples of introductory words, phrases, and clauses:

Exhausted, I climbed into bed.

Hoping for the best, we started our climb up the mountain.

Although it was a cloudy day, I applied sunblock to all exposed skin.

**[ QUIZ ]**

Add commas to correct the following sentences.

1. James who is quite shy has become one of my best friends.
2. Ecstatic the winner hugged her coach.
3. As far as I know that room is empty.
4. Phoebe my cousin twice-removed is going to Hawaii in August.
5. Concerned about her health Jessica made an appointment to see her doctor.
6. Since we hired a new office manager our workload has eased.
7. Senator Clinton from Chappaqua was the keynote speaker.
8. I am friends with the Chester twins and I am friends with Leslie.
9. After running we stretched for ten minutes.
10. Those shoes are available in black tan red and white.