Comprehending Commas pt. 1

What are commas?

Commas are valuable punctuation used to separate elements of a sentence and add clarity to your ideas.

How do I use commas?

We use commas for a variety of reasons, but the most common uses for commas are:

1) Joining 2 independent clauses with FANBOYS (coordinating conjunctions)
2) Joining a leading dependent clause with an independent clause
3) After introductory words, phrases, or clauses (clauses are groups of words)
4) Setting off nonessential clauses
5) Separating items in a list

Comprehending Commas pt. 1

1) Joining 2 independent clauses with FANBOYS

Whenever we join 2 independent clauses (2 full, complete thoughts), we <u>must</u> use a comma <u>AND</u> a coordinating conjunction between the 2 clauses.
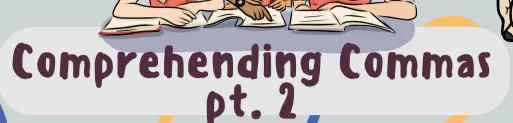
Stan! What is FANBOYS? ✨

FANBOYS is a mnemonic used to remember the seven coordinating conjunctions in English: <u>F</u>or, <u>A</u>nd, <u>N</u>or, <u>B</u>ut, <u>O</u>r, <u>Y</u>et, <u>S</u>o.

Examples:

I woke up early today, <u>so</u> I went on a morning hike.

*<u>Note:</u> The comma comes <u>BEFORE</u> FANBOYS

Shaun doesn't usually like romance movies, <u>but</u> they loved The Notebook.

Comprehending Commas pt. 2

2) Joining a leading dependent clause with an independent clause

Whenever we join a leading dependent clause (an incomplete thought that starts the sentence) with an independent clause, we must use a comma.

What's the difference between dependent and independent clauses?

A dependent clause is a group of words that expresses an incomplete thought (cannot stand alone).
An independent clause is a group of words that expresses a full, complete thought (can stand alone).

Example:

While I normally love the rain, I hope we don't have any more storms this month.

*Note: Most dependent clauses begin with dependent markers like after, although, as, because, before, while, even, since, until, etc.

Comprehending Commas pt. 2

3) After introductory words, phrases, or clauses

We use commas directly after introductory words, phrases, or clauses that begin our sentence and come before our main independent clause.

What is an introductory phrase or clause?

An introductory phrase is a clause that provides context for who, what, when, where, why, and how for the main subject and verb in the main clause it precedes.
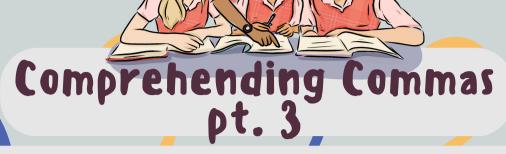
Common introductory words/phrases:

However, Finally, Next, Then, Ultimately, In conclusion, Therefore, According to...., In ..., At ...., etc.

Example:

At the end of the day, I was too tired to read my book.

*Note: A good way to identify an introductory phrase is to move it to the end of the sentence. Introductory words and phrases can most-often be moved to the end of a sentence, without a comma, and the sentence should still make sense.

I was too tired to read my book at the end of the day.

Comprehending Commas pt. 3

4) Setting off non-essential clauses

We use a pair of commas in the middle of a sentence to set off any clauses or ideas NOT ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY to the essential meaning of the sentence. I call this "scoopable phrases!"

What is a scoopable phrase?

A scoopable phrase is a clause or idea that offers additional context or detail about an idea (usually the subject or verb) from the main clause, but is not necessary for the main clause to be a full, complete thought. If we were to remove (scoop out) the clause offset by commas, what's left would make sense.

Example:

My favorite ice cream flavor is Moose Tracks, a delicious creamy vanilla base with fudgy chocolate and peanut butter cups, because that's what my grandma always had.

*Note: If we remove the scoopable phrase, the sentence still makes sense: My favorite ice cream flavor is Moose Tracks because that's what my grandma always had.

Comprehending Commas pt. 3

5) Separating items in a list

We use commas when writing a list of 3 or more items (these can also include noun or verb phrases to keep parallel structure) by placing a comma between each new time (for example: A, B, and C.)

What is parallel structure?

Parallel structure is using the same pattern of word forms, phrases, or clauses to remain consistent and show that the ideas have the same level of importance.

Examples:

Here's an example of simply listing items using commas:

I am going to the corner store to buy milk, eggs, bread, and jam.

*Note: This list consists of simple, common nouns. We use a comma after each noun (before "and" is optional).

Here's an example of parallel structure using commas:
Mateo packed his bag, ate his breakfast, and caught the bus.

*Note: Each of these "items" listed are verb phrases written in past tense to be consistent and show equal importance.