PUNCTUATION

THE COMMA ( , )

A sentence is punctuated with a period, which appears at the end of the sentence. Within a sentence, one may encounter other forms of punctuation: commas, semi-colons, and colons.

Commas separate items and enclose or set off items from the main content of a sentence. A misplaced comma can change the intended meaning of a sentence. Commas are also used after a phrase introducing a short quote.

TO SEPARATE ITEMS

Use commas to separate

- 3 or more nouns, phrases, or clauses in a series.
- 2 or more adjectives in a series that modify the same noun (2 or more “coordinate” adjectives).
  Note: Use a comma before and to clarify the last or final item in a series is a separate item. Known as the Oxford comma, it prevents unintended misstatements.
  e.g., The job required answering phones, cleaning and serving customers.
    Unclear: Here, the job required cleaning customers.
    Clear: The comma clarifies that cleaning does not refer to customers.

- introductory words, phrases, or commands from the rest of the sentence.
  e.g., Yes, please call.
    Please remember, all papers are due tomorrow.
    Unfortunately, our speaker will be late.

- independent clauses (clauses that can stand on their own) that are joined by a conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet).
  e.g., The pitcher threw the ball quickly to first base, but the base runner was safe.
    The pilots fly the plane, and the flight attendants oversee in-flight safety.
    The computer screens were not delivered, so we were all unhappy.

Do not use a comma to separate

- the 2 parts of a compound predicate: one single subject and 2 predicates. A predicate consists of a verb or a word group containing a verb that describes what the subject does.
  e.g., He made a peanut butter sandwich and ate it before leaving the house. (no comma)
    Jane wrote the letter and mailed it immediately. (no comma)
TO ENCLOSE AND SET OFF ITEMS

A pair of commas works like a pair of parentheses.

Use **commas to enclose and set off**
- nonessential phrases: phrases that may enhance meaning, but are not essential to the meaning or the grammatical structure of the sentence.
  - e.g., We can review the meeting agenda over breakfast or, if your time is limited, over the phone.
- a phrase that interrupts the flow of the sentence.
  - e.g., Her new book is better written, though less thrilling, than her last book.
  - Taking a bus is the cheapest, though not the fastest, way to get there.
- an appositive (a modifying phrase used to identify a noun).
  - e.g., MSU, located in the Gallatin Valley of Montana, has a great football team.
  - Jane, president of the student advisory club, introduced the speaker.

**NEVER use a comma**
- to separate a subject and its predicate (verb) in a sentence.
  - e.g., The distinguished professor of accounting, looked on as her student received the award.
  - **Incorrect:** No comma after “professor of accounting.”
  - The person we plan to hire for the new position is Sara Bellum.
  - **Correct:** No comma after “is.”
  - Anyone who contributes will earn intangible rewards.
  - **Correct:** Here, a noun clause is the subject, so there is no comma after “anyone who contributes.”
- to connect two independent clauses **when there is no conjunction.**
  - e.g., Complete the writing assignment by Friday. I must have it corrected by Monday.
  - **Incorrect:** Here, the coma creates a run on sentence.
  - Complete the writing assignment by Friday. I must have it corrected by Monday. 
  - **Correct:** Make 2 sentences and use a period to punctuate both sentences.