

COMMA USAGE

FANBOYS – INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

- Before the words **for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so** when joining two independent clauses in a compound sentence.
His face turned red, but he did not say a word.
My socks smell really bad, so they will be easy to find.
- Watch out for **the comma splice**! Watch out for conjunctive adverbs like *however, moreover, therefore*!
My hamster loved to run, I gave him an exercise wheel.
Your arguments were well presented; however, we feel that the plan is too expensive.

LISTS – ADJECTIVES

- Between words or phrases in a **list or series** (X, Y, ___ Z).
The dog charged through the door, down the steps, and into the garage.
Could you pick up milk, eggs, bread, and hamburger at the store?
“Do you need a comma before the conjunction?” If you want – it’s a style choice. Be consistent.
- Between “equal” adjectives preceding a noun. Try the **“and” test** if you are unsure.
He was a bashful, dopey, sleepy dwarf.
I was really struggling with my long, difficult final exam.

INTRODUCTORY BITS

- After most **introductory modifiers** – adverbial clauses, verbal-phrase modifiers, a phrase, a mild exclamation, and others.
Before I answer you, I want to ask another question.
After opening his backpack, he searched for his new telephoto lens.
Generally, extraterrestrials are friendly and helpful.
No, we are not in danger.
- Between any two words that might be mistakenly read together
After we had washed, Mother prepared breakfast.

INTERRUPTERS

- **Additional information** separate from the primary subject and verb of the sentence – to describe, to specify, to parenthesize, to address, to quote, to title, to date...
My brother, who lives in Salt Lake City, is a chemist.
One comedian, the one with the lisp, was booed off the stage.
The meal, to tell the truth, was quite unappetizing.
“Henry,” said Devin Holmes, Ph.D., “you earned an A on your paper.”
On July 14, 1904, at 316 High Street, Mayville, Illinois, the wedding took place.

References:

English Fundamentals, 15th edition. Emery, Kierzek, Lindblom
University of North Carolina. <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/commas.html>