**English 9 – Sentences and Commas**

5 Rules for Commas

1) use a comma to separate items in a series.

2) use a comma with a coordinating conjunction to separate two independent clauses

3) use a comma to set-off non-essential elements such as a phrase or clause.  Commas should be placed before and after a non-essential element in the middle of a sentence

4) use a comma after an opening clause, word, or phrase

5) use a comma to follow conventions of naming, citing sources, presenting addresses, dates, etc.

1. **Items in a list**

* Separating items in a series signals to the reader that the items are "like" in some respect. The series may be a series of adjectives describing something, a series of things to pick up at the market, or a series of adjective, infinitive, or prepositional phrases.  A series of two or more items should be separated by commas; however, there is some debate about whether the last item in a list of three items should take a comma.
* Felix dislikes *spinach, broccoli, green beans, and brussels sprouts*
* My favourite restaurants are McDonalds, Subway, and Tim Hortons
* Sometimes finding healthy, delicious food can be difficult.
* She was fast, athletic, and graceful.

The Oxford Comma

* My favourite restaurants are McDonalds, Subway , and Tim Hortons
* placed immediately before the coordinating conjunction in a list of 3 or more items

Why do we use the Oxford Comma???

* **It can makes lists less confusing to read. Examples:**
* I love my parents, Lady Gaga and Humpty Dumpty.
* I love my parents, Lady Gaga, and Humpty Dumpty.
* I had eggs, toast and orange juice.
* I had eggs, toast, and orange juice.
* I had milk, a peanut butter and jam sandwich and berries
* I had milk, a peanut butter and jam sandwich, and berries.

1. **Use a comma with a coordinating conjunction (fanboys) to separate two independent clauses**

Two or more independent clauses joined together need strong punctuation: a semi-colon, or a comma and a coordinating conjunction.  This punctuation tells the reader that the clause could stand on its own as a complete sentence. Writers join clauses together to show a close relationship between ideas and to vary the rhythm in the sound of their sentences. And the coordinating conjunctions—and, nor, for, but, yet, and so—also help writers identify the relationship between ideas and create coherence in their writing

* We will be going to the mountains again this summer*, but* this time we will bring mosquito repellant.
* Maya is going to travel throughout Southeast Asia for a year*, and* I will be staying home flipping burgers and going to school.
* Felix does not like spinach*, nor* does he like broccoli*.*

1. **Use a Comma to set off non-essential elements**

A non-essential element is information that is added to the core of a sentence to add further information—information that is useful, but not really essential to understanding the basic assertion.  To signal the reader that a word, phrase, or dependent clause is non-essential information, writers set these elements off by commas before and after the addition.  The information is thus enclosed by commas. If the phrase occurs at the beginning or end of the sentence, only the comma separating the phrase from the rest of the sentence is needed

She is*, as you can probably tell,* pretty nervous about public speaking.

*As you can probably tell,* she is pretty nervous about public speaking.

Once upon a time, *before television and computers,* people read books for fun.

Jake brought his best friends from school*, John and Alex,* home with him for Thanksgiving dinner.

1. **Use a comma after an opening clause, word, or phrase**

*As you can see,* the problem is much bigger than we imagined.

*To help him understand how an internal combustion engine works,* I drew a diagram.

Mild exclamations or interjections:

*Hey,* I thought you were going to study tonight.

*Ok,* then show me how you do it.

*No,* I don't want pineapple on my pizza

A name in a direct address:

*Miguel,* do you want another cup of coffee?

What do you think, *Mr. Dillard?*

1. **Use a comma with various conventions**

Use a comma to separate a city from a province.

I am from Victoria, B.C.

Use a comma to separate the day of the month from the year, and after the year before continuing with the sentence:

The twins were born in June, 1979, one month before my 30th birthday.

Use commas to surround titles or degrees:

Professor Pete McSeed, Ph.D., received his doctoral from Amherst College a year before taking a teaching job at Yale.

**Commas with Quotation Marks**

* Reynold asked, “Can we have ice cream for dinner?”
* Bob snorted and said, “I don’t believe in zombies.”
* “Don’t underestimate me,” she said with a friendly smile.