**Comma Guide**  
A quick look at when, where, and how to use the comma

**When and where to use the comma**

- To separate a coordinating conjunction before an independent clause
  - The squirrel was small, but ran quickly.
- To separate the independent and dependent clauses in a sentence
  - The dog chased after the squirrel, which was much faster than the dog.
- To separate introductory words, a phrase, or clause
  - More than twenty years ago, hyper-color t-shirts were the latest fad.
  - Yesterday, he wore his hyper-color t-shirt.
- To separate items in a list or series
  - The owner wore gloves, a hat, and a hyper-color t-shirt.
- Between adjectives that can be reversed and/or connected with “and”
  - The quick, fuzzy squirrel was very distracting.
  - The fuzzy, quick squirrel was very distracting.
- To set off appositive phrases or extra information
  - The owner, a man who wore a hyper-color t-shirt, could throw the stick far.
- To separate a verb from a quoted statement
  - The owner yelled, “Fetch!”
  - “To my dog,” the owner said, “the squirrel is extremely distracting.”
- To set off transition words
  - The dog, however, was still running after the squirrel.

**What to look for when placing a comma**

- **Independent Clause**: a clause that can function on its own as a complete sentence
  - The squirrel was small, but ran quickly.
- **Dependent Clause**: a clause that cannot stand on its own as a complete sentence and needs to be attached to an independent clause
  - The dog chased the squirrel, which was much faster than the dog.
- **Appositive Phrase**: a phrase occurring next to a noun used to describe it
  - The dog, a yellow lab, ran to get his stick.
- **Coordinating Conjunctions**: words that connect sentence elements that are parallel in structure.  
  Coordinating conjunctions are and, but, or, nor, so, for, and yet.
  - The dog, a yellow lab, ran to get his stick, but was distracted.

**Dates**

- Use to separate month/day/year
  - On June 12, 2009, I played with my dog.
- Not necessary when only month/year or month/year order
  - On 12 June 2009 I played with my dog.
  - In June 2009 I played with my dog.

**Locations**

- Use to separate appositive in location names
  - Chicken, Alaska, is a very small town.
- Use to separate phrases in an address
  - Please send money to The Hat Factory, 411, East Main St., Chicken, Alaska, 7927.
- Not necessary with directional words
  - Northern Alaska has many small towns.
Where not to use the comma

- Do not use after “such as” or “although”
  - Dogs such as the yellow lab are easily distracted.
- Do not use to separate a phrase that provides essential information.
  - His essay “Fads from the 80s” is about hyper-color t-shirts.
- Do not use to separate a verb from its subject
  - The dog chased his stick.
- Do not use between two independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction
  - He threw; the dog ran. (a period or semicolon must be used here.)
- Do not use between an independent clause and its dependent clause when introduced by after, because, if, since, that, unless, until, or when
  - The dog was distracted when it saw the squirrel.
  - The owner believed that his hyper-color t-shirt was still a fad.

Works Cited