Using Commas Study Sheet

Goals of this Study Sheet
The goals of this study sheet are to define what a comma is, the general rules of comma usage, and examples of comma usage.

What is a Comma?
A comma is a punctuation mark that is used to indicate a pause between parts of a sentence. It is also used to separate items in a list and to mark the place of thousands in a large number. Using commas correctly can be tricky. It can be hard to decide to use a comma or a semicolon. However, there is general guidelines to follow when using commas.

General Guidelines

- Use commas to separate independent clauses when they are joined by any of coordinating conjunctions.
  - These are the coordinating conjunctions: and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet.

- Use commas after introductory clauses, phrases, or words that come before the main clause. Some examples are:
  - While I was walking my dog, I found a cat.
  - Because I was not home, I could not answer the phone.
  - If you are not feeling well, you should see a doctor.
  - When it stops raining, I will go jogging.

- Use a pair of commas in the middle of a sentence to set off clauses, phrases, and words that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence. Use one clauses
before to indicate the beginning of the pause and one at the end indicate the end of the pause.

- Use commas to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses written in a series:
  - His hobbies include writing, jogging, and playing video games.
  - The branches of government are the executive, judicial, and legislative.

- Use commas to separate two or more coordinate adjectives that describe the same noun. Coordinate adjectives are adjectives with equal status in describing the noun. If you can use “and” in-between the two adjectives and it makes sense, then they are coordinate adjectives. However, if you can use “but” in-between the two adjectives and it makes sense, then they are non-coordinate adjectives.
  - Example of coordinate adjectives being separated by a comma: The difficult, stubborn man was never easy to talk to.

- Use commas to set off all geographic names, items in dates (besides the month and day), addresses (besides the street number and name), and titles in names
  - New Orleans, Louisiana, is considered to be the birthplace of jazz.
  - On October 18, 1926, Chuck Berry was born.
  - Mehmet Oz, MD, is a famous TV personality.

**Sources Referenced**

Driscoll, Dana, and Allen Brizee. “Commas: Quick Rules.” *Welcome to the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL)*, owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/owlprint/607/.

“Extended Rules for Using Commas.” *Welcome to the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL)*, owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/02./