Research Tips

WHEN SHOULD I USE A COMMA?

#1 To connect clauses with conjunctions

Conjunctions are linking words which connect phrases or clauses. For example:

and	then	whereas
but	because	while
so	or	that

You should put the comma immediately before the conjunction when connecting two clauses or phrases. **For example:**

- I finished work early**, so** I met a friend for coffee.
- The weather on Saturday was rainy**, but** we went to the park anyway.

#2 To separate items on a list

When you create a list of items, each item should be marked off with a comma. Lists are a group of items which could be connected with either the word 'and' or 'or'. However, using a comma is grammatically superior. **For example:**

I am going to the grocery store to buy milk and eggs and bread and cereal.

Should instead be written:

- I am going to the grocery store to buy milk, eggs, bread, and cereal.

#3 To separate a beginning/ending phrase in a sentence

Introductory Phrases

Sometimes sentences are begun with a conjunction or a transitional phrase: these should be separated by a comma.
For example:

- **However,** other research has indicated that this particular assertion might not be true.
- **On the other hand,** Smith suggests that most students would prefer to eat healthy, if the option was available.

Ending phrases

Sentences may also end with a conjunction or an extra clarifying clause. These clarifying clauses are not necessary to the sentence (they couldbe removed and the sentence would still make sense). They should be separated by a comma.

- I don't necessarily agree with this assertion**, however.**
- Many students would prefer to eat healthy, **Smith has suggested.**
- We are going to the cinema today, **which opens at 11am.**

#4 To mark an inserted phrase or word in the middle of a sentence

Non-essential clarifying information added in the middle of a sentence should be separated by commas.

If you are unsure: imagine the sentence without this inserted phrase - does it still make sense? If it does - then separate it with commas. For example:

- Christopher Wollacott**, a businessman from London,** recently visited the University's Library.
- The PC suite**, which is adjacent to the large lecture room,** is currently available.

#5 To introduce a quotation

Commas should be used to introduce a quotation when you indicate that someone is about to speak in a sentence with a statement of introduction. **For example:**

- As Smith suggests, 'Students would prefer to eat healthy'.
- According to Jones, 'The journey is greater than the end result'.

Conversey, you should **not** use a comma if the quotation is **not** being introduced with a statement of introduction. **For example:**

- This 1947 text refers to individuals 'reasonable aptitude' to understand.
- While 'students would prefer to eat healthy', according to Smith, it's not always the case.