Basic Comma Rules

1. Use commas to separate three or more words or phrases in a series.
Examples:
 The colors of the flag are red, white, and blue.
 I scraped, sanded, and varnished the old chair.
 They had money, peace of mind, and even good grammar.

2. Use commas to indicate that a person is being addressed by name.
Examples:
 Fred, did you take the pizza?
 Did you take the pizza, Fred?

3. Use commas after phrases, clauses, or small words that introduce the main idea of your sentence.
Included in this group are transition words and phrases such as "however," "nevertheless," "on the other hand," etc.
Examples:
 No, Fred did not take the pizza.
 Because Kathy went to the Writing Lab often, she learned to correct all of her grammatical errors.
 After the movie, we all went home.
 Consequently, Kathy was glad that she went to the Writing Lab.

4. Use commas to set off words, phrases or clauses that comment on or give additional information about the main part of the sentence, or otherwise interrupt the natural flow of the sentence.
Interrupters are also called appositives or non-restrictive elements.
Examples: Chicago, the windy city, is my home town.
 Joe, after visiting the Smiths, became a vegetarian.
 Priscilla, in the meantime, went skiing.
 Everyone did not, as a result, go windsurfing.

5. Use commas before coordinating conjunctions such as "and," "or,", "but" that join two complete sentences, or when the comma is needed for clarity, emphasis, or contrast.
Examples:
 Chicago may be windy, but it's home.
 Joe went to the Writing Lab several times, and he's writing better essays as a result.

6. Use a comma before non-essential, modifying elements that follow the words and main clause and provide information that supplements or comments clauses on the basic meaning of the main clause.
Examples:
 I live in New Mexico, the "land of enchantment."
 Many college students struggle to pay tuition costs, which are steadily increasing.

7. Use a comma between coordinate adjectives not joined by "and."
Coordinate adjectives each modify the noun independently.
Example:
 The hiker traveled along the steep, narrow trail.
In the above sentence, both "steep" and "narrow" modify "trail." Thus they are coordinate adjectives. Do not use a comma between adjectives that are not coordinate -- that do not both modify the same noun.
Example:
 The team members all wore lime green jackets.
In the above sentence, "lime" modifies "green," not "jackets."

8. Use a comma when noting dates and addresses.
Example:
 It was on April 16, 1963 that Martin Luther King wrote his famous letter.
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