Comma Usage

1. Use commas to separate independent clauses when they are joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, or, so, nor, yet).
   - I went to the store, but it was closed.
     ^Each side of the coordinating conjunction “but” can stand on its own as a sentence. Therefore, you must put a comma before “but.”
   - Trishelle tried to pay her off her debt but was kicked out of her house.
     ^In this example, a comma is not necessary because “was kicked out of her house anyway” is not a complete, independent clause. It is missing the subject of the sentence. That part of the sentence is borrowing the noun “Trishelle” from the first part of the sentence. Because they are not two independent clauses on both sides on the conjunction, we do not put a comma.

2. Use commas to set off non-essential clauses, clauses that are not necessary to understand the meaning of the sentence.
   - Selena Gomez, a young actress and pop singer, performed at the Staples Center yesterday.
     ^The incomplete clause describing Selena Gomez is not necessary for us to know who she is. It is just extra information.

3. Use a comma after an introductory clause or phrase.
   - Sandra Silencio gave Tomas a raise. However, Tomas didn’t feel that he deserved it.
     ^“However” is an introductory phrase that shows contrast between the pervious sentence and the one that follows. It should be followed by a comma.
   - Because her television was broken, Rachel went over to her friend’s house to watch a Grey’s Anatomy marathon.
     ^“Because her television was broken” is an incomplete clause that depends on the other part of the sentence. It cannot stand alone. It indicates why or when the main sentence takes place. Why did Rachel go over to her friend’s house? Because her television was broken. It’s extra information that needs to be set off by a comma.
   - After she quit her job, Sarah decided to go back to school.
     ^The incomplete clause “After quitting her job” is letting the reader know when Sarah decided to go back to school. It is set off by a comma to show that it is extra information.

4. Use commas to separate items in a list.
   - The presenter discussed interest rates, property taxes, and bank loans.
     ^The comma serves to separate the items. Otherwise, a reader could assume that “interest rates property taxes” was one noun.