Language Mechanics Handout

COMMA RULES

RULE

1. Use a comma to separate the parts of a compound sentence.

2. Use a comma to set off an introductory clause, or phrases, or words.

3. Use a comma between 2 or more words in a series when no conjunctions have been used.

4. Use a comma to set off words such as yes, no, well, and however at the beginning of a sentence.

5. Use a comma to set off parenthetical words and phrases which interrupt the sentence with information that is nonessential.

6. Use a comma to set off a noun of direct address.

7. Use a comma to set off appositives, words that rename nouns.

8. Use a comma to set off the items in an address. (Note that there is no comma between the state and the zip code.)

9. Use a comma to set off the items in a date. (No comma needed if the date is inverted or if only the month and year are given, e.g., 2 June 2010 or June 2010.)

10. Use a comma to separate modifiers (adjectives), the order of which can be switched.

11. Use a comma to set off a nonrestraining clause, a group of words which describes a noun and is not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

12. Use a comma to set off a "tag" question (added at the end of a sentence to imply a yes or no answer).

13. Use commas with direct quotations. (Note the variations.)

EXAMPLE

a. Your answers are correct, but you did the wrong exercise.
b. Roberto's wife liked the appliance, and he liked the price.

a. If I don't learn English this semester, I will be very unhappy.
b. While talking to Jean about her plans, I found out that she is going to Hawaii.

a. Rats need places to hide, to nest, and to breed.
b. My favorite sports are swimming, tennis, and skiing.

a. Furthermore, I don't have enough money for the trip.
b. No, I have not traveled in Mexico.

a. You are, of course, planning to attend the convention.
b. Some Americans, however, use chopsticks when they eat Chinese food.

a. Bill, please pass the potatoes.
b. I'm sorry, Mr. Gonzalez, but Dr. Jones isn't in right now.

a. The Mississippi River, the great river of North America, pours into the Gulf of Mexico.
b. Miss Lank, our English teacher, comes from Maine.

a. Payments should be mailed to National Acceptance Company, 4150 Riverside Drive, Cincinnati, Ohio 45201, before the first of the month.
b. The building at 33 West Street, Buffalo, New York, has been sold.

a. On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

a. It was a warm, sunny day.
b. Have you seen that red-haired, freckled-faced teenager?

a. Mrs. Brown, who liked the book, recommended it to me.
b. The tiger, which was driven mad by hunger, killed the sheep.

a. You're going to study these rules, aren't you?
b. Class has been cancelled, right?

a. The student said, "I must study these comma rules,"
b. I must study these comma rules," the student said.
c. "I must study," the student said, "because we have a quiz."d. "Don't interrupt me! I'm studying!" the student shouted.
e. "Do I have to study this?" the student asked.