USING COMMAS

There are five main uses of commas:

1) To set off words, a phrase, or a clause before a subject.

Because the trains were delayed, he was late to class.

Some common starter words for:

Clauses: AFTER, ALTHOUGH, AS, BECAUSE, IF, SINCE, WHEN, WHILE

(While I was eating, the phone rang three times.)

Phrases: VERB + ing (Having finished the test, she left the room.)

TO + VERB (To get a seat, you'd better come early.)

Words: YES, HOWEVER, WELL (Well, perhaps I didn't wait that long for the bus.)

2) To separate items is a list when no other internal commas are used.

They bought lamps, chairs, and wastebaskets.

NOTE: Sometimes the last comma before and is left out.

3) To indicate inserted material.

Kim, my boss, gave me a raise.

(over)
NOTE: Commas appear on both sides of the inserted material, telling the reader that the information is not essential to the meaning of the sentence. In other words, the inserted material could be left out and the sentence would still make sense.

ESSENTIAL: Apples that are green are usually called Granny Smiths.

NON-ESSENTIAL: Apples, which are my favorite fruit, are always available.

4) To introduce or end a quotation.

She said, "You've deserved it." or "You've deserved it," he said.

5) To separate independent clauses joined with any of these seven coordinating conjunctions:

AND, BUT, FOR, OR, NOR, SO, YET (I was grateful, so I sent her a gift.)

NOTE: A comma is not used before a clause introduced by that.

He said that she should not worry.

PROOFREADING FOR COMMAS

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

1) Skim through your paper, stopping at each comma.

2) If the comma isn't necessary for clarity or called for by a rule, drop it.

1) INTRODUCTORY COMMAS

Skim your paper, looking only at the first two or three words of each sentence.

Stop if a sentence begins with a starter word and see if a comma is necessary.

(over)
2) SERIES COMMAS
   Skim your paper, stopping at the conjunctions and or or.

   If these conjunctions link words, phrases, or clauses written in a series, place commas
   after each word, phrase, or clause, except the last one.

3) NON-ESSENTIAL COMMAS
   Skim your paper, looking for a phrase or clause in each sentence that explains or gives
   additional information.

   If the inserted material can be deleted and the sentence would still make sense, commas
   are needed before and after the phrase or clause (unless the phrase or clause is at the end
   of the sentence).

4) DIALOGUE COMMAS
   Look through your paper to find quotations.

   Check to see if commas have been used when introducing or ending quotations.

5) Skim your paper, stopping at each of the seven coordinating conjunctions.
   See if an independent clause (a sentence) is on either side. If so, place a comma before
   the coordinating conjunction.