COMMA USAGE

Coordinating Conjunctions

In the English language, a comma is a punctuation mark used to separate clauses in a sentence and make lists. Commas are most frequently used when two independent clauses, or sentences, are connected by a coordinating conjunction—*for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so.* These are also known by the acronym FANBOYS.

In order to be used correctly, the comma must be used with a coordinating conjunction and two independent clauses. An independent clause must include a **subject** and a **verb,** usually with an **object.** A common mistake is to use a comma before any coordinating conjunction without considering if the second half of the sentence is an independent clause.

For example, you do not need a comma here:

**Civil engineering is one of the oldest fields in engineering and still garners a lot of prestige to this day.**

But you do need a comma here:

**Civil engineering is one of the oldest fields in engineering, and it has contributed to significant advances in civilization.**

Comma Splices

A common mistake is using a comma to connect two independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction; independent clauses must be connected via a period or a semi-colon, not a comma. Doing this is known as a comma splice.

Example comma splice:

**The rate law establishes a link between a reactant concentration and the rate of reaction progress, this means it should be used to determine the outcome in the lab report.**
Dependent Clauses & Commas

Commas are also needed when a dependent clause precedes the independent clause of the sentence. A dependent clause is a clause that adds more detail to the sentence but is not a sentence on its own. This comma rule also applies to introductory or transitional words at the beginning of a sentence.

For example:

Due to the nature of certain chemical reactions, we must use PPE when performing this research.

First, we must review the methodology.

Dependent clauses that add more information inside of a sentence also must be contained within commas. These clauses disrupt the independent clause by separating the subject from the verb, so the phrase needs commas to denote that it differs from the main idea of the sentence.

For example:

The principal facies of this area, located at the edge of the Delaware basin, were identified using core samples provided by Company X.