### Common Commas

A Utah State University Writing Center Resource

#### Introductory Phrases

Separate introductory phrases (e.g., clarifying or background information) from the rest of the sentence.

- Before we go to the store, we need to create a grocery list.
- While getting ready for bed, Amber received a phone call.
- However, I do not believe him.

#### The Oxford Comma

The Oxford comma is the last comma in a list of 3+ items. Style guides have varying attitudes towards it.

- I like apples, cakes and bananas. (no Oxford comma)
- I enjoy running, biking, and hiking. (Oxford comma included)
- I went to lunch with Kaye, my best friend, and my roommate. (Oxford comma for clarity—three different people listed)

#### Combining Sentences

**The Comma Splice**

Do NOT combine complete sentences with just a comma.

- I like cake. I love cookies. (comma splice!)  
  
  **Fixes:**
  - I like cake, and I love cookies. (conjunction)
  - I like cake; I love cookies. (semicolon)
  - I like cake. I love cookies. (periods)

- I like cake, I love cookies. (Two complete sentences)
- I like cake and love cookies. (Not two complete sentences)

#### Mid-Sentence Clarifications

Use commas to set off phrases (aka, relative clauses) that add extra clarifying information in the middle of the sentence.

- Jared said that the tomatoes, which he had been caring for all summer, had died in the first fall frost.
- Einstein, who was born in Germany, is famous for his theory of relativity.

#### Cause/Effect & Because

When creating if/then or causal statements, use a comma.

- If you love me, then you’ll buy me tacos.
- Because he was late, he received detention.
- He received detention because he was late.

#### Quotations & Dialogue

**Commas go inside quotation marks.**

- "She proved rather boring," he said.
- Many dream images were characterized as "raw," "powerful," and "evocative" (Arie 10).

**Commas (and periods!) go outside quotation marks when used with in-text citations.**

- "At the end of the novel, sitting "in a square of sunlight granted by a clerestory window far above their imaginations" (Howie 437), Wolf and Bear reappear.