

## Misusing Commas

Commas are misused in several ways;

- (1) Commas are not necessary when only two items appear in a list.

INCORRECT: I went to town to buy milk, and eggs.

CORRECTED: I went to town to buy milk and eggs.

- (2) Commas are not necessary when connecting two verbs to a single subject or two subjects to a single verb.

INCORRECT: Joe, and Sarah went to town. They bought a dog, and named him Pinky.

CORRECTED: Joe and Sarah went to town. They bought a dog and named him Pinky.

- (3) Commas are not necessary when a phrase is attached after an independent clause.

INCORRECT: The Carson-Newman dance team appeared, to perform its routine.

CORRECTED: The Carson-Newman dance team appeared to perform its routine.

- (4) Commas are not necessary when a dependent clause appears after an independent clause.

INCORRECT: The football team works out in the gymnasium, because they want to improve.

CORRECTED: The football team works out in the gymnasium because they want to improve.

- (4) Commas are necessary when three or more items appear in a list.

INCORRECT: I went to town to buy milk sugar and eggs.

CORRECTED: I went to town to buy milk, sugar, and eggs.

Note in particular the different suggestions about serial commas. Some style guides--such as the *Associated Press* format used by journalists--do not require a comma before the final item in a list (i.e., *and eggs*). Other style guides do require them. Ask your teacher for her requirements.

- (5) Commas are necessary when connecting two independent clauses with a pure conjunction.

INCORRECT: Joe went to town last night and Sarah bought a dog at the pet store.

CORRECTED: Joe went to town last night, and Sarah bought a dog at the pet store.

(6) Commas are necessary when a phrase is attached before an independent clause.

INCORRECT: To perform its routine the Carson-Newman dance team appeared on the field.

CORRECTED: To perform its routine, the Carson-Newman dance team appeared on the field.

(4) Commas are necessary when a dependent clause appears before the independent clause.

INCORRECT: Because they want to improve the football players pumped iron night and day.

CORRECTED: Because they want to improve, the football players pumped iron night and day.

(5) Commas are necessary when a semicolon combined with a conjunctive adverb connects two independent clauses together.

INCORRECT: The football players want to improve; accordingly they pump iron day and night.

CORRECTED: The football players want to improve; accordingly, they pump iron day and night.

(6) Commas are necessary when connecting more than two verbs to a single subject or more than two subjects to a single verb.

INCORRECT: Joe Sarah and Moe went to town. They visited a pet store bought a dog and named him Pinky.

CORRECTED: Joe, Sarah, and Moe went to town. They visited a pet store, bought a dog, and named him Pinky.