**More Common Punctuation Rules and Errors**

**Use a Comma . . .**

1. to separate items in a series

**EX**. All my cousins, aunts, and uncles came to the reunion.

(Commas joined by and, for, or nor are optional.)

1. to separate short independent clauses

**EX.** The engine roared, the wheels spun, and a cloud of dust swirled behind the sports car.

1. to separate two more adjectives preceding a noun

**EX**. Let's have a picnic under that lovely, shady fruit tree.

1. in compound sentences joined by a coordinating conjunction (FANBOY)

**EX.** The Wilsons grow organic vegetables, and they sell them at the market.

1. in complex sentences that begin with the dependent clause

**EX.** When the weather is bad, the dog hides under the bed.

1. to set off nonessential clauses and participial phrases

**EX.** Eileen Murray, who is at the top of her class, wants to go to medical school. (nonessential clause)

**EX.** Tim Ricardo, hoping to make the swim team, practices everyday. (nonessential phrase)

1. after introductory elements such as a mild exclamation

**EX**. Yes, she is going to the cafeteria. Oh, you are Andy's brother.

1. after an introductory participial phrase

**EX**. Switching on a flashlight, the ranger led the way down the path.

1. after TWO or more introductory prepositional phrases

**EX**. On the hook near the door, you will find the keys.

\*May use a comma after one prepositional phrase if needed to make the meaning clear.

to set off elements that interrupt the sentence

**EX**. His guitar, according to him, once belonged to Bono.

1. to set off appositives

**EX**. Hillary Duff, a teen actress, stars in *Lizzie McGuire*.

1. to set off parenthetical expressions (transition words) such as after all, for example, in fact, etc.
2. to set off words used in direct address

**EX**. Linda, you know the rules.

1. to separate items in dates and addresses

**EX**. After Tuesday, November 23, 2002, address all orders to 23440 Cinco Ranch Blvd., Katy, TX 77494.

1. after the salutation and closing of a personal letter
2. to set off abbreviations that follow a person's name

**EX**. Carol Ferrara, M.D., is our family physician.

**Use a Semicolon . . .**

1. between independent clauses that are closely related in meaning if they are not joined by a FANBOY

**EX**. Patty likes to act; her sister gets stage fright.

1. between independent clauses joined by a subjunctive adverb or transitional expression

**EX.** Emma felt shy; however, she soon made some new friends. (notice the comma **after** however)

1. between items in a series IF the items contain commas.

**EX**. I would like to introduce Mr. Lee, our mayor; Mrs.

Bell, his secretary; Mr. Lincoln, the editor of our newspaper; and Ms. Quinn, our guest of honor.

**Use a Colon . . .**

1. before a list of items, especially after expressions like *the following* and *as follows*.

**EX.** You will need to bring the following equipment:

a sleeping bag, a warm sweater, and extra socks.

1. before a long formal statement or a long quotation.
2. between the hour and minute (10:30)
3. between the chapter and verse in Biblical references and between titles and subtitles ( John 3:16 or *Whales: Giants of the Sea*)
4. after the salutation of a business letter