COMMA TRAUMA!

If you use too many commas, your writing suffers from comma splices. If you use too few commas, then the thoughts inherent in your writing become difficult to understand.

Commas are not cosmetic -- there are rules!

1. Use commas to separate three or more items in a series.
   (If a conjunction such as ‘or’ or ‘and’ connects items, no comma is needed.)

   My brother likes swimming, hiking, and fishing.
   She ran through the field, over the hill, and into the woods.
   I had coffee and eggs and a bagel with cream cheese for breakfast.  (no comma!)

2. Use a comma before a conjunction that joins the parts of a compound sentence.
   (After the comma, the sentence is complete and can stand alone)

   The young girl finished her homework early, and her mother took her to the movies.
   The gymnast smiled when she finished her routine, and the crowd went wild!

3. Use a comma after certain introductory elements such as No, Now, Well, Oh, Why, Yes.
   Also, use a comma to separate introductory phrases (a group of words without a verb) if
   there are FOUR OR MORE WORDS.

   Oh, I didn’t see you!       No, you may not go to the party.
   Well, it’s awfully cold today.
   Throughout the boring class, I kept drifting off to sleep.
   After the movie we’ll go and have pizza.  (no comma -- only three words!)

4. Use commas to separate elements in dates, addresses, and geographical names.

   Thursday, June 4, 1992, was a great day in my life.
   I moved to 28 Law Road, Briarcliff Manor, New York, 10005.
   Paris, France

5. Use commas to set off interrupting expressions.
   (Only one comma needed if interrupting expression comes at the beginning or end of
   sentence)

   My brother, for example, studied at the French Culinary Institute.
   In fact, I don’t think that he is a good leader at all!
   Mickey Mouse is my favorite cartoon character, I guess.

6. Use commas to set off nouns of direct address.

   Please, Ms. Bryan, don’t give us more homework!
   I will give you a detention if you don’t sit down, Charlene.
   Well now, class, let’s open our books.
7. Use commas to set off most appositives and their modifiers.
(An appositive is a noun or pronoun that comes directly after another noun or pronoun and renames that noun or pronoun. Ex: Tokyo, the capital of Japan...)

Rhode Island, the smallest state, has a lovely shoreline.
Have you ever met Angelina, the famous actress?
Key West, an island resort, has a bridge to the mainland.

8. Use a comma between adjectives in a series when they modify a noun.
(If you can substitute the word and for the comma, then you are doing this correctly)

Saratoga is a clean, beautiful, charming place to live.
He is a tall, handsome, well-groomed man.

9. Use a comma to separate direct speech (quotations) from a speaker.

Lydia screamed, “I won!”
“I’ll be there in a minute,” I told my mother.

10. Use a comma to set off transitional words.

However, you must turn in your report before you leave.
Therefore, I stayed after school to finish my project.

11. Sometimes it is necessary to use commas to prevent misunderstanding or misreading.

To Emily William was a fool. ------ To Emily, William was a fool.

This sentence isn’t about a girl named Emily William, as you might first think. If you add a comma after Emily, you’ll see that the sentence reveals Emily’s opinion of William.

The next two sentences would also be confusing without commas:

After seeing his uncle Bill bought a paper. ------------ After seeing his uncle, Bill bought a paper.

Above the jet roared through the sky. -------- Above, the jet roared through the sky.

If you try reading those sentences without commas, you’ll see that it is possible to misread them.