Commas

Commas are frequently used to separate different words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence from each other for the sake of clarity. You will most often use commas in the four following situations:

1. To separate items in a series.
The physical education teacher distributed baseballs, gloves, bats, volleyballs, tennis rackets, and tennis balls.

A democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

2. To separate parts of a compound sentence.
Some men are born great, some men achieve greatness, and some men have greatness thrust upon them.

Most performers at the open mic event last night played music, but others read poetry, and a few even tried their hand at stand-up comedy.

3. To set off phrases in apposition.
(Apposition refers to two phrases that are grammatically parallel and refer to the same thing.)
My best friend, Sue.
The first president of the United States, George Washington.

4. After introductory phrases
Fighting against reason, Martha decided to pull an all-nighter in hopes of passing the exam.

Without understanding why, Annie woke from a deep sleep with an urge to check on her children.

**TIP**
In some cases, leaving out commas can make the sentence unclear.
Jim, Jill and Mike went ice skating.
Did Jim go ice skating, or is he being addressed?

If Jim did go ice skating, include the comma to make the sentence clear.
Jim, Jill, and Mike went ice skating.

Other places where you will need to use a comma include the following:

To separate two or more adjectives preceding a noun.
Susie has had a long, busy, tiring day.

To set off words names, or other words used in direct address.
I appreciate it, Dr. Jones, that you called me after office hours.
To separate information in dates.
Friday, February 2, 1967

But...
February 1967 (no comma if only month and year)

To separate addresses, cities, states, and countries.
Robert moved to Miami, Florida, with his parents.

His new address is 971 Carolina Avenue, Miami, FL 33139.

After certain introductory words such as well, yes, no, oh, well, sure, etc.
Yes, you can go to the party.

Well, look at it this way.

Oh, look at that beautiful butterfly!

To set off expressions which add information or show a relationship between ideas like after all, however, therefore, of course, for example, for instance, meanwhile, moreover, on the other hand, and in fact.
In fact, we are leaving tomorrow for vacation.

You, on the other hand, have a test tomorrow you need to study for.

To set off an abbreviation such as Jr., Sr., or M.D.
James P. Nelson, Sr.

James P. Nelson, Jr.

Robert S. Green, M.D.

To set off alternative or contrasting phrases.
It is Julio, not his mother, who sets the plot in motion.