Commas . . .

- go after introductory phrases.
  --No, you can’t drive.
  --Sue, when will you listen?
  --She said, “Well, now I’m going to be late.” (In this case, we have two introductory phrases—one after the other.)

- separate three or more items in a list.
  --She said, “Well, you can’t drive, walk, or run.
  --You should study, sleep, and eat right.

- go before coordinating conjunctions (“SOBA”s: So, Or, But, And) when those SOBAs are used to bring together two full sentences.
  --She said, “Well, you can’t drive, walk, or run, but you can crawl.”
  --I went to school, and I learned a lot. (As opposed to, “I went to school and learned a lot,” which doesn’t need a comma because then you just have a list of two items.)
  --You should go to sleep, so be sure to go to bed early.

- go before AND AFTER interrupting elements (like parentheses).
  --She said, “Well, you can’t drive, walk, or run, unless you do it slowly, but you can crawl.”
  --You went to class, your favorite but you didn’t listen.
  --I told you, Sam, you have to come with me.

- go between adjectives (descriptive words) when you can put “and” between them and the sentence still makes sense.
  --He had long, frizzy hair.
  --I ate a big, yummy cupcake. (NOT “I ate a dark, chocolate cupcake” because you can’t really say, “I ate a dark and chocolate cupcake.”)
I. Commas for items in a series

Use commas to separate three or more items in a series: “I write poems, plays, and short stories.”
“Did you eat breakfast, lunch, or dinner?”

Do not use commas to separate two items in a series:
“I write poems and plays.”
“Did you eat breakfast or lunch?”

II. Commas after introductory phrases

Use commas after introductory phrases:
“After eating dinner, I went to bed.”
“Well, how often can you work?”
“In fact, you were late to class.”

Note: It is possible to have two—or even three—introductory phrases, one after the other:
When I asked my dad what time it was, he said,
“Well, it’s around three.”

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Ramsey. March 2014
ELMO Practice: Insert commas where necessary.

1. After school today I went to the gym to the bank and to the store.

2. Although I didn’t eat much last night I still wasn’t very hungry this morning or tonight.

3. Last night I went to bed closed my eyes and counted sheep.

4. For example when I said “You’re late” he didn’t even look at me talk to me or stop walking.

5. In fact you should approach the teacher make eye contact and apologize for being late.
III. Commas with coordinating conjunctions

Words like “so,” “or,” “but,” and “and” ("SOBA"s) are often used as coordinating conjunctions, meaning with a comma, they can pull together two full sentences.

Use commas to pull together two full sentences with a coordinating conjunction:
- “I write books, and I write plays.”
- “Did you eat breakfast, or did you eat lunch?”
- “She walked to school, but she was late.”
- “We already ate, so we saved some time.”

Remember—do not use commas to separate two items in a series:
- “I write books and plays.”
- “Did you eat breakfast or lunch?”
- “She walked to school but was late.”

The trick: Use your finger to cover the “SOBA” (“so,” “or,” “but,” and “and”) then ask yourself if you have two full sentences. If you do have two sentences, then you do need a comma before the coordinating conjunction. If you don’t have two full sentences, you don’t need a comma.
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5. In fact you should approach the teacher make eye contact and apologize for being late.
IV. Commas with interrupting elements

An “interrupting element” is a break in the sentence—an unnecessary part of the sentence:

- “An advisor, who is usually a faculty member, will guide students as they choose their classes.”
- “Time management, an important skill for all students, is taught at many colleges.
- “I already told you, Tom, that I’d be away.”

Use commas before and after interrupting elements. You need two of them to work as a pair. Like parentheses, they work together to separate the interrupting element from the rest of the sentence:

- “Time management classes, while not exactly fun, are necessary for some students to succeed.”
- “Sometimes, without even admitting it to themselves, students use time-management strategies they’ve learned in class.”
- “College, while expensive, is a valuable part of most people’s educational plans.”

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ELMO Practice: Insert commas where necessary.

1. After school today even though I was tired I went to school to the bank and to the store.

2. Although I didn’t eat much last night I still wasn’t very hungry this morning this afternoon or tonight.

3. Last night even though I wasn’t tired I went to bed closed my eyes and counted sheep.

4. For example when I said “You’re late” he didn’t even look at me talk to me or stop walking.

5. In fact no matter how late you are you should approach the teacher make eye contact and apologize for being late.

6. She said “Well if you’re going to stay late even a little while you can wash dishes and dry them.”