IMPROVING EDITING SKILLS: COMMAS

Purpose: While there are several rules regarding the use of commas, there are three rules that you will find yourself following in most every writing assignment you do. Therefore, this DLA is designed to strengthen your ability to find and fix three common comma errors. Read the material below, and then complete the activity that follows.

TERMS TO KNOW
An independent clause contains a subject + a verb + a complete thought. In other words, it is a complete sentence.

A dependent clause contains a subject + a verb but not a complete thought. In other words, it is not a complete sentence. If you put a period directly after one, it will result in a fragment. Dependant clauses often begin with words like although, even though, because, while, and so on.

A nonrestrictive word group tells more about or modifies a word or phrase, but it is not needed because taking it out will not change the meaning of the word or phrase. Therefore, you use commas.

RULE #1: When you join two independent clauses with a conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), you need to use a comma. However, you do not use a comma if you join only two words or phrases.

independent clause
The Writing and Reading Center is a wonderful place to seek help from instructors, and it is also a good place to find other resources like tutors and workshops.

independent clause

RULE #2: Use a comma after introductory material. The material can be in the form of a dependent clause, phrase, or word (that needs to be set off to prevent confusion).

dependent clause
Although at first I was reluctant to go to tutoring, I am glad I made myself go because it has helped me improve my grades.

independent clause

After waiting in line for twenty minutes, the student realized she had forgotten to bring the DLA she wanted help with.

RULE #3: Use a comma (or two) to set off transitional words, phrases, or nonrestrictive word groups. Note that transitional words and phrases you use commas with can be moved to different locations in the sentence.

For instance, I now use the Darling’s Guide to Writing on a regular basis when I am in the WRC.

Stella could not believe, for example, that Eduardo’s affections for her were fake.

Dr. Khan, who had a big smile on her face, said the operation was a success.
**IMPROVING EDITING SKILLS: COMMAS**

**STEP 1:** Using the information you just read about three common comma rules, do the activity below. There are five missing and five unneeded commas in the paragraph below. Using the symbols demonstrated below, place commas where needed, and cross out commas that are unneeded. Each sentence contains one comma error. (Hint: One error needs two commas to fix it.)

Ex. Although the Writing and Reading Center is often busy it is a wonderful place to seek help from instructors, and tutors.

While college is challenging in a number of ways students can excel if they keep in mind three important tips. First students should be curious. While all students, have specific areas of interest, it is important for students to want to know information that does not seem to directly involve their degree area in order to help them stay engaged in non-degree courses. Another, important tip for students to follow is to be willing to change. Many students struggle, or drop out of college due to an unwillingness to become the person they need to be in order to be successful in the college environment. Students should look forward to evolving as people and college provides a wonderful environment to do that in. Most importantly students should start viewing themselves as a brand. Companies like Coca-Cola, and Apple will go to great lengths to make sure that nothing negative is associated with their product. Likewise, it is vital for students to understand that how they behave, and who they associate with can affect their image and thus future outcomes. Fortunately, being successful in college and thus in life is not difficult to do when students understand how to go about it.

**STEP 2:** Take your finished activity to a WRC instructor on duty, go over your answers, and make whatever changes are necessary. Ask the instructor to fill in the section below.

____________________________  ___________________________  __________________
instructor’s name          instructor’s signature         date