Commas Made Easy!!

The best piece of advice I can give you regarding comma usage is never to use a comma without knowing, consciously, why. Use your head and the 11 rules listed below to determine when and where a comma is needed.

Rule #1 - Use a comma between the main parts of dates and addresses. Use commas to set off geographical names and professional titles.

geographical names	The speaker that day was from Atlanta**,** Georgia.
items in dates	Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12**,** 1809**,** in a log cabin near Hodgenville, Kentucky.
professional titles	Stella Glenn**,** Ph.D.**,** will be the main speaker at the banquet.
Addresses	Ralph and Stella lived at 123 Easy Street**,** Zipsville**,** Alberta.

Rule #2 – Use commas to separate items in a series or list (greater than 2 items).

Ralph had a pet salamander, a pet rock, and a wife named Stella.

Stella liked to skateboard, rollerblade, and ride her new bike.

Rule #3 –Use commas to introduce direct quotations or to separate the "tags" (he said/she cried) from the quoted material. Remember, the comma always comes before the quotation mark.

"Don't go too fast," Ralph warned Stella.

Stella yelled, "Get that salamander out of my way!"

Rule #4 – Use commas to set off words of direct address.

1) I am terribly sorry, Ralph, but your salamander bit me.
2) Stella, how could you do this to me?

Rule #5 – Use commas to set off non-essential phrases/clauses. These add extra information to a sentence but are not necessary to its intended meaning.

1) She sped from the shop, which was called "Lizards-R-Us", with the little creature stuffed in her pocket.
2) Newspeak, which greatly reduced people's vocabularies, lessened their ability to understand scientific words.

Rule #6 – Use a comma to set off an absolute phrase.

1) Her mission accomplished, she headed for home.
2) His pet returned, Ralph dumped Stella.

Rule #7 – Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, nor, yet, for, so) that separates two independent clauses.

1) State censorship boards flourished, **but** the pressure groups wanted a more comprehensive ban on objectionable material.

2) The student explained her question, **yet** the instructor still didn't seem to understand.

3) Yesterday Bootsie ate a lot of tuna, **and** Kari was forced to run to the grocery store for more.

Rule #8 - Use a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or clause that comes before a main clause.

**Common starter words for introductory clauses that should be followed by a comma include *after, although, as, because, if, since, when, while*.

<u>Word</u>: Strangely, no one has suggested that Watergate gave us a "new Nixon."

<u>Phrase</u>: Despite immigrant's high hopes, their illusions were often shattered

<u>Clause</u>: Since the new system was implemented, payroll has been processed 25% faster than it had been using the prior system.
**However, do not put a comma after the main clause when a dependent clause follows it.

        She was late for class because her alarm clock was broken.

Rule #9 - Use a comma to separate coordinate adjectives.

You could think of this as "That tall, distinguished, good looking fellow" rule (as opposed to "the little old lady"). If you can put an *and* or a *but* between the adjectives, a comma will probably belong there. For instance, you could say, "He is a tall and distinguished fellow" or "I live in a very old and run-down house." So you would write, "He is a tall, distinguished man" and "I live in a very old, run-down house." But you would probably not say, "She is a little and old lady,"

Rule #10 – Use a comma with an appositive.

An appositive is a noun or pronoun -- often with modifiers -- set beside another noun or pronoun to explain or identify it. Here are some examples of appositives.

Your friend Bill is in trouble.
noun   appositive

My brother's car, a sporty red convertible with bucket seats, is the envy of my
noun   appositive
friends.

Rule #11 – Use commas around words or phrases that interrupt sentences.

The man, **however**, was not fooled by the trick.

The water, **dashing against the rocks**, foamed and splashed.