Commas may seem arbitrary, but they are used in essentially 5 different ways:

1. With *for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so* to connect two complete sentences

   Stephen walked into Diversions, and Emma bought him a Duke of Earl.

   Remember, a complete sentence requires both a subject and a verb. For example,
   
   Becca drove to Point Defiance and watched the sunset.
   
   does NOT require a comma because “watched the sunset” is not a complete sentence.

   An easy way to remember these coordinating conjunctions is with the acronym **FANBOYS.**

2. To separate out an introductory or explanatory phrase

   Taking a sip of her coffee, Anna began to read.
   Will, who had already done the assignment, sat back and relaxed.

3. With transitional phrases like *however, moreover, therefore,* and *for example*

   Nakisha enjoys breakfast burritos; however, Kristen prefers toasted bagels.

4. To set off items in a list or series

   Renee, Haleigh, and Alex demolished the cheese and crackers.

   The comma before the *and* in a list is known as the **Oxford comma.** It’s optional but recommended to avoid confusion and misreading.

   Billy and Austin craved their favorite breakfast, anchovies and chocolate.

   Without the comma, it sounds like “anchovies and chocolate” is their favorite breakfast, not part of the list. The comma makes this clearer:

   Billy and Austin craved their favorite breakfast, anchovies, and chocolate.

5. With coordinate adjectives

   Garrett seeks a hearty and delicious soup.
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   If the adjectives cannot be joined by *and,* a comma may not be necessary.

   Grete ordered a rich and chocolate and layer cake.

   The *ands* are unnecessary, so a comma isn’t needed:

   Grete ordered a rich chocolate layer cake.

Adjectives are considered **coordinate** if they could be joined with and. It may help to think of this case as a list of adjectives.