Signpost Punctuation

Pesky Punctuation 1: The Comma

- **Signpost punctuation** refers to the punctuation marks that:
  - readers anticipate
  - help readers understand your sentence

The Comma

- **Tip:** Have you been told to put a comma where you pause or breathe? *Forget it!*
  - Know why you are inserting or deleting a comma.

- The comma is the most common internal punctuation mark in English.
  - It is used in the following 4 ways ...
The Comma: No. 1

- The comma separates two main clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet).
  - Observant managers notice problems (often before the employees do), and good managers react immediately to rectify problems.

What is a main clause?

Main Clause = Sentence
A sentence can stand alone!

What is a main clause?

A sentence has:
- The cat ate the mouse!
  - Subject
  - Verb
  - Object

The Comma: No. 1

- The comma separates two main clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet).
  - Observant managers notice problems (often before the employees do), and good managers react immediately to rectify problems.

What if there is no and?

- When two sentences run together with only a comma or with no punctuation, you have a run-on error.
- Run-ons make it hard for the reader to understand your sentence.
The Run-On Error

- These are run-on sentences because two sentences run together:
  - Observant managers notice problems (often before the employees do); good managers react immediately to rectify problems.
  - Observant managers notice problems (often before the employees do); good managers react immediately to rectify problems.

The Comma: No. 2

- The comma separates a nonessential element from the main clause.
- Nonessential elements may have useful, important information, but the reader can still understand the sentence without them.

  - The best employees, those who produce good work on time, are sometimes hard to hire in today’s market.

How do I know it’s nonessential?

- You can grab hold of the handles (the punctuation) around the nonessential element and pull it out of the sentence ... 

  - The best employees, those who produce good work on time, are sometimes hard to hire in today’s market.
The Comma: No. 3
- The comma separates an introductory element from the main clause.
  - Regardless which service we use, we must have a temp at this desk by Monday morning.

The Comma: No. 4
- The comma separates items in a series.
  - Good management tells the employee that you are paying attention, that you do care about the employee’s contribution to the company, and that you value the employee.

Item 1

Item 2

Item 3
The Comma: No. 4

- The comma separates items in a series.
  - Good management tells the employee that you are paying attention, that you do care about the employee's contribution to the company, and that you value the employee.

The serial comma? You decide!

- Should a comma come before the word and at the end of a series?
  - It is always correct to include the serial comma.
  - But the serial comma may be omitted if the series remains easy to read.

The Serial Comma

- Good management tells the employee that you are paying attention, that you do care about the employee's contribution to the company, and that you value the employee.

Difficult to read:
Use the comma before the and.

Easy to read:
Use the comma before the and.
Or omit the comma before the and.

- Be sure to pick up tape, scissors, and ribbon on your way to the office!
- Be sure to pick up tape, scissors and ribbon on your way to the office!

The Comma ...

Use punctuation deliberately to guide your reader.