# The Writing Center

### **Commas**

Commas have a wide variety of uses in sentences. Use a comma for the following:

#### • To separate the words in a series or list

My grocery list includes tortilla chips, pork chops, pickles, and Frosted Flakes.

# • Before coordinating conjunctions (remember the FANBOYS!) when forming a compound sentence

The boys wanted to stay up late to watch *King Kong*, but they fell asleep at 8:30.

#### • To set off introductory words, phrases, and clauses

If he finished his homework early, Jerome would have time to play video games.

#### To set off appositives, interrupters, and adjective clauses

Metropolis, the home of Superman, really exists in southern Illinois.

Katie, of course, is running late again.

Brett, who has a long history of kleptomaniac behavior, stole his neighbor's riding lawn mower and drove it to Wisconsin.

#### • To set off nouns in direct address

Carlos, the doctor will see you now.

I told you, Tina, we have to pick up the tickets at the box office.

#### • To set off direct quotations in a sentence

"The Blackhawks game starts at 6:30," said Alan.

The former president asked, "Do you want fries with that?"

#### • To set off interjections

No, you can't have bite of my sandwich.

#### • To separate adjectives of equal importance

The tall, handsome man walking toward them had to be an undercover cop.

## • After the greeting in a friendly letter/email, and after the closing in all letters/emails

Dear Uncle Phil,

Sincerely,

**Don't forget!** You also use commas between the name of a city and state (e.g., Chicago, Illinois) and between the day and year in a date (e.g., February 14, 1997), as well as in numbers of more than three digits (e.g., 1,999 or 525, 600).

**Practice: Commas** 

A. Keeping the rules for comma usage in mind, insert commas in the following passage wherever they are needed.

What is James Bond's favorite drink?

Not the vodka martini.

A painstaking study at atomic martinis.com of Fleming's complete works has shown that James Bond consumed a drink on average every seven pages.

Of the 317 drinks consumed in total his preferred tipple was whisky by a long margin – he drinks 101 in all among them fifty-eight bourbons and thirty-eight Scotches. He's pretty fond of champagne and in one book You Only Live Twice which is mostly set in Japan Bond tries sake. He likes it: he has thirty-five of them.

Bond only opts for his supposed favorite the vodka martini nineteen times and he drinks almost as many gin martinis.

The famous "shaken, not stirred" line appears for the first time in *Diamonds are Forever*. Sean Connery was the first screen Bond to utter "shaken, not stirred" in Goldfinger and it occurs in most of the films thereafter. In 2005 the American Film Institute voted it the 90th greatest movie quote of all time.

James Bond's personal martini recipe taken from the first book Casino Royale is: "Three measures of Gordon's one of vodka half a measure of Kina Lillet. Shake it very well until it's icecold and add a large thin slice of lemon peel."

Adapted from: Lloyd, John, and John Mitchinson. The Book of General Ignorance. New York: Harmony, 2006.

#### B. Your Turn! On your own sheet of paper, write a sentence that:

- 1) Uses commas to separate the words in a series or list.
- 2) Uses a comma before a coordinating conjunction.
- 3) Uses a comma to set off an introductory word, phrase, or clause.
- 4) Uses commas to set off appositives, interrupters, or adjective clauses.
- 5) Uses a comma to set off a noun in direct address.
- 6) Uses a comma to set off an interjection.