Commas

Commas are used for:
1) Separating a word, phrase, or clause from the rest of the sentence
2) Enclosing a word, phrase, or clause that is not essential to the sentence

The Separating Commas
I) Use commas to separate complete sentences that are joined together by the following conjunctions: for, and, but, or, nor, yet, so. The same applies when using these conjunctions: either ... or, neither ... nor. The comma goes before the conjunction.
   Correct: I want to go to Disneyland, but it is too far away.
   Correct: Either Henry will take us home, or we will walk back.
   Correct: Dogs barked and cats meowed. (Note: You don't need a comma here because the independent clauses are short—you can't get confused about the meaning.)

II) Use a comma to separate introductory words or phrases from the rest of the sentence.
   Correct: Before dating, Rocky made sure he was dressed to impress.
   Incorrect: Before dating Rocky made sure he was dressed to impress.

III) For three or more words/phrases/clauses listed in a series, commas should separate each item and the last comma should come before the “and” before the last item in the series.
   Correct: I have a lot of diamonds, rubies, and emeralds in my room.
   Correct: What I need is food for my dog, toys for my children, and a day off for myself.

IV) Use commas to separate dates, parts of addresses, and titles that follow names.
   Dates: Separate the day, month, and year. Correct:
   Today is Tuesday, February 10, 2005.
   Addresses: Separate the name, the street address, city name, and state
   Correct: I live at Hotel Hawaii, 777 Jake Street, Laie, Hawaii 96762
   (Note: no comma between state and zip code)
   Titles: When a formal title follows the name, use a comma to separate.
   Correct: John Brown, M.D., asked me if I was a patient.

V) Use commas to separate a person from their speech. After direct quotations, put the comma inside the quotation marks.
   Correct: "Oh boy," he said, "this is a lot to remember."
   Correct: She screamed, "I don't think so!"

The Enclosing Commas
VI) Use commas to enclose additional information that is not necessary to the basic meaning of the sentence. In other words, if we took out the word/group of words within the commas the sentence would still make sense.
   Correct: My brother, the tall and handsome one, was offered a job as a model.
   Correct: All of the stores, which lined the street, were broken into by the mob.
   Correct: None of the trees, however, suffered damage.
VII) On the other hand, don't use commas if the word/group of words provides information that is **needed** to identify/describe the basic meaning of the sentence! The meaning would change if the following underlined phrases were omitted from their sentences:

Correct: All of the stores that sold perfume were broken into.
Correct: Students who exercise regularly tend to have lower stress.

VIII) Use enclosing commas to indicate when a person is being spoken to.
Example of someone speaking to John: "Most of the men, John, used to be firefighters."

IX) Use commas to indicate contrasts.
Correct: I am Jake, not Jack.
Correct: It didn’t surprise me that he didn’t win, but lost.

**Overall Tip:** Use commas when you think it will make the meaning of the sentence clearer. If not, don't use it! Also, don't use commas to replace periods, semicolons or other punctuation marks! Good luck!