SUPER QUICK ENGLISH TIPS
**Comma Rules**

**Dependent Clauses and Phrases in Complex Sentences**

A complex sentence is made up of dependent and independent elements. Dependent clauses and phrases rely on an independent clause (complete thought/sentence) in order to make sense. Dependent clauses and phrases are generally separated from the independent clause by a comma when the dependent clause or phrase begins the sentence.

Example:  
When I was a girl, I ran a five mile race each month.  
Dependent clause: When I was a girl  
Independent clause: I ran a five mile race each month.

Example:  
In time, I will find out the truth.  
Dependent phrase: In time  
Independent clause: I will find out the truth.

**Commas and compound sentences**

Compound sentences consist of two or more independent clauses (complete thoughts that can stand alone as sentences) joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

Example: I want to eat out tonight, but I don’t want to spend a ton of money.

**Series construction**

A series consists of three or more elements serving the same function in a sentence. Each element is followed by a comma.

Example: I like ice cream, cookies, and cake.

Example: I loved riding my bike as a girl, taking long walks in the park, and helping my mom prepare dinner.

**Commas with nonessential elements and naming**

When a word, phrase, or clause is followed by information that acts solely to modify or name and can be cut from the sentence without changing the meaning of the sentence, commas are used.

Example: John, my last date, was a very skinny man.

Example: I loved my first car, its leather seats and big chrome bumpers.

Example: My son, Frank, is now fifty-one years old.
Comma Errors

**Comma Splice**

A comma splice occurs when a compound sentence is missing a coordinating conjunction and relies on a comma to join the two elements together.

Example: I love to run in the heat, I also have to watch out for dehydration.

Correction: I love to run in the heat, but I also have to watch out for dehydration.

**Fused/Run-On Sentence**

A fused/run-on sentence occurs when one or more commas are left out of a compound or compound/complex sentence.

Compound Error: Jen and Elizabeth are my nieces but neither one resembles me or my sister.

Correction: Jen and Elizabeth are my nieces, but neither one resembles me or my sister.

Complex Error: When I was fifteen I broke my arm in a car accident.

Correction: When I was fifteen, I broke my arm in a car accident.

Compound & Complex Error: At six years of age I lost the last of my baby teeth and I was very sad because I liked receiving money from the tooth fairy.

Correction: At six years of age, I lost the last of my baby teeth, and I was very sad because I liked receiving money from the tooth fairy.
Other Common Writing Problems

**Fragments**

Fragments are incomplete phrases or clauses that are punctuated as complete sentences. They depend on an independent clause (complete thought/sentence) in order to make sense. Dependent phrases and clauses can often be added to a sentence that comes after it or added to the sentence that comes before it. If the dependent phrase or clause doesn’t make sense when added to another sentence, it must be rewritten.

Example: Incorrect: As the summer wore down.

Correct: As the summer wore down, I began to panic about starting college.

Independent clause

Dependent clause

Correct: The summer wore down.

Independent clause

**Context errors**

Context errors generally occur when one word (often a homonym) is substituted for another.

Example: Incorrect: Too much Tylenol effects the liver.

Correct: Too much Tylenol affects the liver.

Example: Incorrect: I live over their.

Correct: I live over there.

**Word choice and clarity**

Too much baggage in a sentence or placing words in the wrong order can confuse the reader. Economy of words and chronological or space order are very important to keep meaning clear.

Example: Incorrect: I remember walking in on Christmas day and playing with the porcelain doll that depicted the baby Jesus in the mantel display.

Correct: I remember walking into the living room on Christmas day, looking at the mantel display, and playing with the porcelain doll that depicted the baby Jesus.
Other Useful Rules

Adverbs

Adverbs answer the question how and modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Adverbs also generally end in “ly”

Verb Modification Example: I walked quickly down the street. How did I walk – quickly.

Adjective Modification Example: The temptingly sweet cookie, was nestled in a white paper napkin. How sweet is the cookie – temptingly sweet.

Adverb Modification Example: He ran very awkwardly to the office. How awkwardly did he run – very awkwardly.

Apostrophe Use

Apostrophes are used to show possession (who or what owns something) or to indicate missing letters in contractions.

Example: John’s bike was stolen yesterday. (Who or what owns the bike John, so the word is written John’s)

The monkeys’ bananas were strewn about the cages. (In this case, the who or what that owns the bananas is a plural word that ends in “s”, so the apostrophe comes after the “s”)

I didn’t go home last night. (Didn’t means did not; the apostrophe is used in place of the “o”).

Bold font

Bold font should be used very selectively and never to decorate text.

Capitalization and consistency

Proper names are capitalized. However, when a name is questionable, a judgment call may be in order; but whatever the choice, the same format should be followed consistently throughout the paper.
**Gerunds**

Gerunds are words that look like verbs but act like nouns. These words usually end in “ing.”

Example: Knowing, remembering, counting

Knowing how to knit is a useful skill. Knowing acts as the subject in the sentence.

**Numbers**

Numbers that are one or two words long should be written as words.

Example: 52 = fifty two

**Prepositions**

Prepositions are words such as to, for, in, on, with, about, over, by, from. When these words are used, they indicate relationships, time, place, or position.

In means within something. Example: I live in a house.

On means on top of. Example: The pen is on the desk.

**Subject verb agreement**

Subjects and verbs must agree in number. Plural subjects require plural verbs. Plural subjects often end in “s” and plural verbs most usually do not end in “s”.

Example: That girl walks home every day. Singular (one girl)

The girls walk home every day. Plural (many girls)

**Transitions**

Transitions ease flow and create logical connections between ideas. When you move from one big idea in a paragraph to another or from one paragraph to another, make sure to use transitional words. Some common transition words include also, in addition, in contrast, however, furthermore, and moreover. For a more comprehensive list, please refer to your LB Brief.

**Verb tense**

Switching between verb tenses can be very confusing to a reader. If the author is reflecting on a past event, everything about this memory should be told in the past tense.