**Commas and Introductory Elements**

Commas are used for many different purposes and are often misused as well. One of the most common comma mistakes is leaving out a comma separating an introductory element from the rest of a sentence. Introductory elements, as their name suggests, provide extra information that introduces the sentence and appear at the beginning of the sentence. Because introductory elements can come in several different forms and lengths, it is sometimes difficult to identify when or where a comma is necessary. Consider the following information when writing and punctuating sentences to avoid leaving out these important commas:

1. A single word can be an introductory element. These single-word introductory elements are often adverbs but can also be adjectives, interjections, or verbs:

**Unfortunately**, he forgot to use a comma.

1. A phrase can be an introductory element. Phrases are word groups that do not contain both a subject and a verb:

**Hopeful about the future**, she walked across the graduation stage.

There are several different types of phrases to look out for:

* Prepositional Phrases: phrases that begin with prepositions (After the storm, on the roof, under the bed, by quitting, in the middle of the night, etc.)
* Verbal Phrases: phrases that begin with verbs/verb-like words (working at the store, shocked by the sight, feeling sick, to be the best, etc.)
* Adjectival Phrases: phrases that begin with adjectives (hopeful about the future, open to new possibilities, upset and exhausted, etc.)

1. A dependent clause can be an introductory element.

**When they woke up**, the storm was still raging.

Dependent clauses often begin with a subordinating conjunctions such as those in the following table:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Common Subordinating Conjunctions** | | | | |
| after | because | in order that | than | when |
| although | before | now that | that | whenever |
| as | even if | once | though | where |
| as if | even though | rather than | till | whereas |
| as long as | if | since | unless | wherever |
| as though | if only | so that | until | while |

1. Leaving off a comma following an introductory element can cause confusion.

Whenever you can come and visit me in Pensacola.

Without the comma, the above sentence reads as a fragment.

**Whenever you can,** come and visit me in Pensacola.

With the comma, the sentence’s meaning becomes clear.

**Practice Placing Commas after Introductory Elements**

Place a comma after each introductory element. Remember, introductory elements appear at the beginning of the sentence and may be single words, phrases, or dependent clauses.

1. In the end Amanda decided to go back to college.
2. Though they would be tired in the morning they stayed up to watch the lunar eclipse.
3. To get better she needs to get plenty of rest and to drink lots of fluids.
4. Quietly Danny snuck in after missing his curfew.
5. Of course the sentence was missing a comma.
6. Although the book looked old and valuable a few tests proved it to be a counterfeit.
7. At seventeen the dog was beginning to have health problems.
8. After a long day of working, going to school, and parenting Marcia just wanted to sleep.
9. Knowing her sister and brother would arrive soon Peggy frantically tidied up the house.
10. Slowly the manatee moved along the riverbed.
11. Overcome by joy Tiffany held her baby for the first time.
12. Hanging up the phone Dennis sighed.
13. Restless and irritable Michelle was ready to get back on her feet.
14. As they say the rules are made to be broken.
15. Pulling open the door Ken smelled something delicious coming from the kitchen.
16. Because the air conditioner was leaking we had to turn it off.
17. Appalled at her daughter’s behavior Brenda apologized to the other guests.
18. Rather than ask for help again Sandi tried to make it on her own.
19. Usually we eat breakfast before heading to work.
20. Having completed this worksheet I now understand how to place commas correctly after introductory elements!