SUU Writing Center — Clauses

*For information on Independent and Dependent Clauses, see tip sheet on Sentence Fragments. This tip sheet will address relative clauses, the difference between restrictive and nonrestrictive relative clauses, and introductory clauses. When discussing introductory clauses, this tip sheet assumes that writers have knowledge of the difference between independent and dependent clauses.

Relative Clauses:

A relative clause acts as a clause that modifies a noun or a pronoun. Relative clauses begin with a relative pronoun (*who, whom, which, that, whose*). Relative clauses can either be <u>restrictive</u> or <u>nonrestrictive</u>.	Examples: I like carrots *that have a green, leafy top*. [Clause modifies the noun *carrots*.] I'll answer to him *who holds his tongue*. [Clause modifies the pronoun *him*.]

Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Clause:[1]

Restrictive Clauses:

A restrictive clause is an adjective clause that is essential to the meaning of a sentence because it limits its noun or pronoun to one particular person, place, thing, or set. In other words, the meaning of the sentence would change if the clauses were deleted. Because restrictive clauses are essential, commas do <u>not </u>set them off.

All students *who do their work* should pass easily.
    [All students will not necessarily pass; only all students who do their work will. Thus, the clause is essential to meaning and does not require a comma.]

Nonrestrictive Clauses:

A nonrestrictive clause is an adjective clause that adds extra or nonessential information to a sentence. The meaning of the sentence would not change without the clause. Nonrestrictive clauses often modify proper nouns (university=common noun; SUU=proper noun). Commas always set off nonrestrictive clauses.

Edgar Allen Poe, *who wrote "The Raven"*, is a great American poet.
    [The information contained in the clause is not necessary for readers to understand the meaning of the sentence. Thus, the clause is nonrestrictive and must be set off with commas.]

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[1] Whether a clause is restrictive or nonrestrictive is often subjective; the writer will have to decide what his/her intent is and act accordingly.

Introductory Clauses:

Definition: An introductory clause is a dependent clause that introduces the independent clause within a sentence. It requires a comma. In other words, it is a fragment that introduces the main sentence.	After the rain stopped, a rainbow appeared. Before you begin, please read the instructions. When the party ended, we decided to find a nice hotel.
Comma usage: Commas are used in introductory clauses to accomplish two goals: 1) To avoid misunderstanding by clarifying elements and 2) To introduce segments of a sentence.	**To avoid misunderstanding and clarify elements:** When the ball hit, Amy Lynne yelled. [The placement of the comma indicates that Amy Lynne yelled after the ball hit.] When the ball hit Amy, Lynne yelled. [The new placement of the comma now indicates that Lynne yelled once the ball hit Amy.] **To introduce segments of a sentence:** After the new PE building opened the old one became a Multipurpose Center. [Incorrect: Without the comma, the sentence could be misread; did the new PE building open the old one?] After the PE building opened, the old one became a Multipurpose Center. [Correct: Now the meaning of the introductory clause is clear.]

Below are examples of subordinating words often used to begin introductory clauses that need a comma:

After
As if
Where
Because
Since
(Even) Though
Although
Provided
Wherever
Before
Until
If
Unless
When
Whenever