Ranly’s rules: punctuating for consistency

You always place a comma:
1. After words in a series, but not before “and” or “or” unless the meaning is unclear. The bat, ball and glove were his.
2. After an introductory dependent clause in a complex sentence. Until he came, the party was quiet.
3. After an introductory independent clause in a compound sentence, before the coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet). The gang soon left, but Jeff stayed.
4. Around nonessential, nonrestrictive words, phrases and clauses. (“Which” always introduces a nonrestrictive clause; “that” always introduces a restrictive clause.) The third house that has green shutters is his.
5. After introductory participial phrases. Waiting in the bar, Tom grew restless.
6. After two or more introductory prepositional phrases. In May of last year, profits were up.
7. After an introductory interjection (“Oh, so that’s it.”), an independent element (“Yes, I’m certain.”), a direct address (“Harry, come here!”).
8. Between coordinate adjectives. (Adjectives are coordinate if they can be reversed and if you can insert “and” between them.) The gaunt, lonely creature was also afraid.

You may place a comma:
1. After introductory adverbs. Suddenly, it’s summer.
2. After an introductory prepositional phrase. In his later years, he grew even more conservative.
3. After short sentences in a series (three or more) — rather than semicolons or periods. It was cold yesterday, it was cold today, and it will be cold tomorrow. (Note: When using commas to connect short sentences, a comma precedes the final conjunction.)

You always use semicolons:
1. After elements in a series when the elements have commas. The list included the following: Bill Corrigan, 31, of 445 N. Main St.; Sheila Smith, 28, of 333 Elm St.; and Shawn Taylor, 36, of 71 S. Edgewood Ave. (Note: in a series such as this, a semicolon precedes the final conjunction.)
2. Between independent clauses to show that they are closely related when no coordinating conjunction is present. She had an inquiring mind; she read a great deal.

You always use colons:
1. To introduce more than one item.
2. After an attribution that introduces a direct quotation of more than one sentence. As Anatole France said: “An education isn’t how much you have committed to memory, or even how much you know. It’s being able to differentiate between what you do know and what you don’t.”

Note: Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks.

Some adjectives are never coordinate, such as those referring to:
1. Color. The sleek red convertible was too dangerous.
2. Age. The tired young man performed badly.
3. Material. The expensive silk scarf did not sell.
4. Shape. The tall round building was a bank.
5. Nationality. The prominent French director died yesterday.

Use dashes to show dramatic contrast or emphasis.
The killer whale raced across the pool toward his trainer — then kissed her on the cheek.

Use hyphens:
1. Between compound adjectives. Adjectives are compound when both or several adjectives can’t stand independently with the noun. Eight-green house; 7-year-old girl
2. Between compound nouns when the meaning is unclear. Animal-lovers
3. Between adverbs and adjectives. Unless the adverb ends in “ly.” well-constructed; badly burned