Episode 076 – Grammar

1. **Punctuation in written forms of speech**

Addressing someone
In conversation, you often mention the name of the person you are talking to. This form of addressing someone by name is separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma. That can be at the beginning or end of the sentence or clause.

Examples:
***Anna,** was machen wir jetzt?*
*Worüber denkst du nach**, Harry?***
*Gut**, Anna,** wir werden einen Plan machen.*

In letters, too, the name of the person you are addressing is followed by a comma and the rest of the sentence is written without a capital letter at the beginning. To express particular emphasis in the greeting, you can use an exclamation point instead of a comma. The words that follow form a new sentence and therefore must begin with a capital letter.

Examples:
*Sehr geehrter **Herr Walkott,***   *Lieber **Harry!***
wir laden Sie zu einem Vortrag über die Zeitschleife ein.   *Wie geht es dir?*

Exclamations
Exclamations, commentary and affirmations in sentences are also separated by a comma.

Examples:
Ja, wir haben Spaß.
Ah, genau, der Banküberfall!
Okay, also hier ist der Eingang der Bank.

Additions and afterthoughts
Additions and afterthoughts can be inserted into sentences to emphasize or provide more information about certain words or groups of words. Such additions are separated by commas and appear next to the word(s) they refer to.

Examples:
*Wir treffen uns **dort, vor der Bank.***
(The afterthought "vor der Bank" provides more information about the intended meaning of "dort".)

The insertion is also closed off by a comma if the sentences continues afterwards.

Example:
*Wir treffen uns **dort, vor der Bank,** und gehen gemeinsam hinein.*

If a word refers to a previous word or group of words, then it is separated by a single comma.

Example:
***Du und dein Kollege Helmut, ihr** seid zur Bank gefahren.*
(The pronoun "ihr" provides particular emphasis by referring back to the phrase "Du und dein Kollege Helmut".)

2. Punctuation in lists of words

Commas are used to separate a string of words - unless those words are joined by conjunctions such as "und" and "oder". Usually the last word listed is preceded by "und". In that case, there is no comma in front of it.

Examples:
Nein, nein, nein!
Nein, nein und nochmals nein!
Ich brauche ***Stift, Papier und Informationen von dir****.*

The same applies to groups of words, clauses and to join two independent clauses of equal ranking.

Grammatical phrases:

Example:
Wo war der Mörder - ***vor der Bank, in der Bank oder im Hinterhof****?*

Dependent clauses:

Example:
*Ich möchte auch wissen**, wer das getan hat, wer mein Mörder ist.***

Independent clauses:

Examples:
*Ostrowski wird uns nicht helfen**,** Anderson wird uns nichts sagen.*
Ostrowski wird uns nicht helfen **und** *Anderson wird uns nichts sagen.*

Two independent clauses joined by the conjunction "und" do not require a comma. But a comma can be used nonetheless to make the sequence of events in the sentence even more clear, especially if the two independent clauses have different subjects.

Example:
Ich erinnere mich an den Hinterhof, und dann war da der Schuss.

Exceptions
No comma is used before a cumulative adjective. A cumulative adjective is an adjective that directly precedes the noun and forms a unit with it. The adjectives before that modify the unit as a whole. Inserting commas can change the meaning of the sentence.

Examples:
Ich möchte ein großes bayerisches Bier.
(= "Bayerisches Bier" forms a unit in this sentence. In other words, the Bavarian beer is a big one.)

Wirf deine hässliche eingelaufene Hose in den Müll.
(= The shrunken pants are ugly. In other words they are ugly because they shrank.)

Wirf deine hässliche, eingelaufene Hose in den Müll.
(= The pants are shrunken and ugly. In other words, they were ugly before they shrank.)

More:

In German, the following coordinating, subordinating and correlative conjunctions join together words, groups of words or clauses of equal ranking, so they are usually not preceded by a comma: "und", "oder", "bzw."/"beziehungsweise", "sowie", "wie", "entweder ... oder", "sowohl ... als auch", "weder ... noch".

A comma precedes the conjunctions "denn", "aber", "jedoch", "doch", and "sondern".