Avoiding Common Comma Mistakes

Why should I check for comma errors?
Improperly placed commas can break up a sentence into illogical parts and can cause confusion for the reader.

Do not place a comma...

⇒ After a main clause when the subordinate clause follows it
The only time this is appropriate is if you are trying to show extreme contrast.

• My ride arrived, while I was still eating.

⇒ To set off essential elements of the sentence
For example, a comma should never precede that statements, because that statements are always essential information. If information is essential, it cannot be removed from the sentence without altering the meaning of the sentence.

• He is dreaming, that he can fly.

⇒ To separate the subject from the verb
In English, these numbers require hyphens in writing.

• The most valuable attribute of an athlete, is quick reflexes.

⇒ To separate the elements in a compound predicate
A prefix is placed at the beginning of a word to modify or change its meaning. Usually, hyphenated prefixes are used to separate two consecutive vowels to avoid confusion.

• I quickly turned the corner, and ran into a glass door.

⇒ Between the elements in a compound subject or object
This rule is usually used to designate an action.

• The woman on the phone said that the job was still available, and that the manager wanted to interview me.

• The woman on the phone said that the job was still available and that the manager wanted to interview me.

*For further explanation of these commas rules, reference the Purdue OWL at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/02/