Commas That Make Lists Clear

Teacher		**Class**	Grade 5
Subject	ELA	**Topic**	Commas in a series
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United States

Students learn to separate items in a series with commas. They fix messy lists together and write their own clear list.

Curriculum links

- Use punctuation to separate items in a series.

Learning objectives

- Students will place commas correctly to separate three or more items in a series.
- Students will explain how commas in a series make meaning clear for readers.

Success criteria

- I can put a comma after each item in a series except the last.
- I can read a list aloud with pauses and count three or more items.
- I can write one sentence with and or or that lists three items clearly.

What students already know

Show: pens glue and scissors with no commas. Ask: How many things do you see and where would you pause when you read it?

Key words

comma	a small mark [,] that shows a short pause and splits parts [3]
series	a list of three or more things of the same kind in one sentence [3]
item	one single thing counted as part of a list [10]
conjunction	a linking word such as and or or before the last thing [9]

Materials

- Slides 1-12 with projector and speakers
- sentence strips with missing commas
- comma cards
- markers
- mini whiteboards and pens
- printed copies of Worksheet Task F

Before the lesson

- Print sentence strips using Slide 9 sentences and Worksheet Task F copies, one per pair
- Print or cut large comma cards for pairs to place on strips
- Test Slide 6 Video clip 1 (0:00-1:57) for sound and picture
- Set desks for pairs with markers and mini whiteboards ready

Lesson outline

0–5 min **Starter** 5 min · Whole class

Hook students with a confusing list to show why commas in a series matter.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 1 Commas in a Series title and read the hook in Say.
2. Show Slide 3 Muddle or Clear? and point to the No Commas sentence.
3. Read I need notebook paper and pens flat with no pauses, then read I need notebook, paper, and pens with pauses.
4. Ask partners to turn and talk about how many things they heard each time.

STUDENTS DO

1. Listen to both readings and look at Slide 3 compare.
2. Turn and talk with a partner about how many things each version shows.
3. Vote with fingers: 2 or 3 or not sure for the no-commas version.

Say: I wrote my supply list with no commas and now I cannot tell what I need — can you fix it for me? Look at these two versions on the board. Listen to how I read them and count how many separate things you hear.

Worked example: No commas: I need notebook paper and pens. -> Confusing! Is it notebook paper as one thing, or a notebook and paper as two? With commas: I need notebook, paper, and pens. -> Step 1 count items = notebook / paper / pens = 3 things. Step 2 pause at each comma. Easy to see! [10]

Ask: How many things do you see with commas: I need notebook, paper, and pens? (Three separate things: notebook, paper, and pens.) · Why is I need notebook paper and pens confusing? (No breaks, so we cannot tell how many items are included. [10])

Check understanding: Quick finger vote for number of items. If split, reread with pauses and underline each item on the board before moving on.

Support: Point to each word as you read slowly and hold up one finger per item so students hear three chunks. **Stretch:** Ask students to say what changes if the last and becomes or and what that means.

Use: Slides 1–3

5–15 min **Teaching** 10 min · Whole class

Teach the rule for separating three or more same-kind items with commas.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 4 How It Works chain and read each step aloud.
2. Show Slide 7 The Series Rule bullets and underline that a series means 3+ items with the same job [3].
3. Model with We bought apples, peaches, and bananas today on the board: underline apples, peaches, bananas, then add commas [3][6].
4. Think aloud the rule that when three or more words are joined with and or or, a comma should follow each item except the very last [9].

STUDENTS DO

1. Choral read Slide 4 steps and Slide 7 bullets with the teacher.
2. Watch the underlining and comma placement and copy the fixed sentence.
3. Clap once at each comma when the class reads the sentence back.

Say: A series is three or more items with the same job in one sentence. We put a comma after each one but the last, and we add and or or before the last item. Then we read it back to check the list is clear.

Worked example: We ran jumped and laughed. -> Step 1 spot 3 same-kind actions: ran / jumped / laughed. Step 2 put a comma after each but last: ran, jumped, laughed. Step 3 add and before last: We ran, jumped, and laughed. Using the comma before and is always correct [10].

Ask: What counts as a series? (A group of three or more items having the same function and form in a sentence. [3]) · Where exactly do the commas go? (After each item except the last, with and or or before the last item. [9]) · Do we need a comma before and? (Yes, use it. It is always correct and it prevents confusion. [10] [4])

Check understanding: Mini whiteboards: students write yes for series or no for not a series for pen and book versus pen, book, ruler. Reteach 3+ rule if many miss it.

Support: Show the three underlined items in different marker colors and add commas together one at a time.
Stretch: Ask students to change and to or in the modeled sentence and explain if it is still a series.

Use: Slides 4, 7

15–30 min **Guided Practice** 15 min · Whole class

Practice spotting series and hearing comma pauses together with video and voting.

YOU DO

1. Play Video clip 1 (0:00–1:57) on Slide 6 and pause to count items as a class.
2. Show Slide 5 Your Pick vote and have the class read the three snack lists with pauses.
3. Display Slide 9 Your task sentences and fix the first one together on the board.
4. Lead choral reading with pauses to show the break between items [10].

STUDENTS DO

1. Watch the video and call out where commas go and how many items they see.
2. Vote on Slide 5 snack lists and justify which list is clearest.
3. Fix Slide 9 sentences with the teacher and read them aloud with pauses.

Say: Watch where each comma goes and count the items with me — 3 or more? We will vote on the clearest snack list, then we will fix two messy lists together. Read aloud with pauses so we hear each break.

Worked example: She packed pens glue and scissors. -> Step 1 count items: pens / glue / scissors = 3 single words. Step 2 add commas after pens and glue. Step 3 add and before last: She packed pens, glue, and scissors. Commas separate three or more words written in a series [22].

Ask: How do you know this is a series that needs commas? (It has three or more words with the same job in one sentence. [22]) · How does pausing at commas help the reader? (Each comma shows a break so we can keep track of how many items are included. [10])

Check understanding: Hinge vote on Slide 5: hold up 1, 2, or 3 for best list and give a reason. If unsure, model underlining items again.

Support: Provide a sentence frame: I think the commas go after ___ because ___ to join the talk. **Stretch:** Ask students to suggest a fourth snack to add to a list and say where the new commas go.

Use: Slides 5–6, Video clip 1 (0:00–1:57)

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30–50 min **Main Activity** 20 min · Pairs

Build and fix series sentences in pairs to place commas accurately.

YOU DO

1. Hand out sentence strips with missing commas, comma cards, and markers.
2. Direct pairs to underline each item first, then add a comma after each item except the last [9].
3. Circulate as pairs read fixed sentences aloud and pause at each comma to show the break [10].
4. Hand out Worksheet Task F for pairs who finish strips to proofread a paragraph for missing commas.

STUDENTS DO

1. Underline items on each strip and place comma cards in the right spots.
2. Read each fixed sentence aloud with pauses and check breaks between items.
3. Complete Worksheet Task F proofread if finished, fixing missing series commas.

Say: Underline each item in your series first, then place a comma card after each one but the last. Add and or or before the last item. Read it back to your partner with a pause at each comma to check it is clear.

Worked example: I packed a notebook pencils and a folder for class but with commas missing -> Step 1 underline 3 items: a notebook / pencils / a folder. Step 2 add comma after each but last: a notebook, pencils, and a folder. Step 3 read back: I packed a notebook, pencils, and a folder for class. A series is three or more items having the same function and form [3].

Ask: How many items are in your strip and how do you know? (Three or more same-kind words, so commas separate three or more words in a series. [22]) · Where does the last comma go? (After the second-to-last item, before and or or; the traditional comma there is always correct. [10])

Check understanding: Pairs read one fixed sentence and point to each comma. If misplaced, have them recount items and re-place cards.

Support: Give strips where the three items are already underlined in different colors so students only focus on placing commas. **Stretch:** Ask students to add a fourth item to the series or change and to or and rewrite the sentence.

Use: Slides 9–10, Worksheet Task F

50–60 min **Plenary** 10 min · Whole class

Show how commas change meaning and check everyone can write a clear series.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 11 mystery about the panda and read both versions aloud.
2. Explain that omitting the final comma before and can sometimes cause confusion [4].
3. Show Slide 12 Exit ticket and model one correct list sentence.
4. Collect exit sentences and link back to success criteria.

STUDENTS DO

1. Discuss with a partner how commas change the panda story.
2. Write exit ticket: one thing learned plus one original three-item list with commas.
3. Share one exit sentence with the class if time allows.

Say: Commas can change the whole story. Listen to eats shoots and leaves versus eats, shoots, and leaves. Now write your own learning point and one list with commas correctly for your exit ticket.

Worked example: Eats shoots and leaves = eats plants. Eats, shoots, and leaves = eats, fires, then goes! [8] Steps: spot 3 actions, add commas after eats and shoots, read with pauses to hear three separate actions.

Ask: How did commas change the panda sentence? (Without commas it means eating plants; with commas it means three separate actions. [8]) · What will you check in your own list? (Three or more items, comma after each but last, and or or before last. [9])

Check understanding: Read three exit tickets aloud and check commas after each item but last. If errors, remodel one sentence on the board.

Support: Provide starter: In my desk I keep ___, ___, and ___ so students only fill drawn items. **Stretch:** Ask students to write a second sentence that lists three actions with the same objects.

Use: Slides 11–12

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Putting a comma before the first item or after the last item	Sentence starts with comma after verb or ends item, and before period	Remodel to put a comma after each item except the very last, never before the first item [9]
Using commas for only two items joined by and	Student adds commas to I brought a pen and a book	Count items together: two is not a series; a series needs three or more items with the same job [3]
Leaving out the last comma so the last two items blur together	List reads as one combined item when read aloud with no pause	Add the comma before and or or; using it is always correct and prevents confusion [10][4]

Support

- Give strips where the three items are already underlined in different colors so students only focus on placing commas
- Use sentence frame I think the commas go after ___ because ___ and clap once per item to hear chunks

Stretch

- Ask students to add a fourth item to the series or change and to or and rewrite the sentence
- Ask students to build a series with short phrases like in a desk, in a backpack, and around the classroom [22]

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For the LSE or teaching assistant

Sit with pairs needing help during Main Activity; prompt them to underline and count 3+ items first, then place comma cards one at a time.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer
Where do commas go in a series of three words?	After the first and second items, before and: pens, glue, and scissors.
How many items make a series and why?	Three or more same-kind items; two items do not need commas. [3]
Write a series sentence about class tools with commas.	Example: I packed a notebook, pencils, and a folder. Commas after each item but last. [9]

Homework

Write two new list sentences with three items each and read them aloud with pauses.

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