

How to Teach Punctuation for Items in a Series

When I taught second grade, many of my students struggled with identifying items in a series and knowing where to put the commas. Introducing the concept with the children in a hands-on activity so they could understand better did wonders. I'd like to share some ideas for how to teach this concept in a way that's friendly to right-brained learners, using visuals and hands-on elements.

What you will need:

- Sample sentences containing items in a series
- Chart paper and marker, or teacher whiteboard and markers
- Sets of objects such as plastic foods, plastic animals, writing utensils, books, baking tools (measuring cup, spoon, and measuring spoons) and so forth
- Drawing paper or newsprint for each child (or whiteboards and markers)
- Crayons or markers
- Paper and pencil

Sample sentences you might use:

“I made a picture with crayons, markers, and paint.”

“At dinner last night we ate corn, ham, and green beans.”

“My favorite games are checkers, Uno, and Monopoly.”

“My best friends are Oliver, Jack, and Henry.”

“Our playground has swings, monkey bars, sandboxes, and slides.”

What to do:




1. To prepare for later in the lesson, write your sample sentences on chart paper, leaving plenty of room between each sentence.
2. Gather the children close so they can see well.
3. Introduce the lesson by sharing how frequently we mention items in a series when we are talking to someone. As an example, show the children the baking tools and say, “When I bake a cake, I use measuring cups, measuring spoons, and a spoon to stir the batter.” Show the animals you brought and say, “When I go to the zoo, my favorite animals to see are the elephant, the zebra, and the giraffe.” Show them the plastic foods you brought and say, “Yesterday I ate a banana, grapes, and an orange.”

4. Next, tell the children you are going to show them on your chart paper the same thing you just talked about. Display a clean sheet of paper and write, thinking out loud so they can see what you are thinking as you write. Write the example sentences that you talked about in step 3.
5. Ask children to come up and circle the three items in each sentence.
6. Point out the fact that each of the sentences has AND right before the last item. Underline the ANDs in each sentence.
7. Next, ask the children to take turns sharing three items. It could be three animals, three favorite foods, three favorite cartoons, etc.
8. Prompt them to write a simple sentence on their whiteboards using the three items they chose. The sentence could be as simple as “I like snakes, lizards, and bats.”
9. When they have all written a sentence on their whiteboards, read the first sentence from your chart that you prepared ahead of time. “I made a picture with crayons, markers, and paint.”
10. Ask the children what the sentence is telling us. When they have identified the drawing tools as the items in the series, circle them. Underline the AND. Point out the commas that separate the items. Suggest that the commas keep the items separate so they don’t get mixed up.
11. Suggest that the children draw a picture on their paper or whiteboard of what happened in the sentence. For example, for sentence #1, they might draw a stick figure that made a picture. By the stick figure they could draw the tools that the stick figure used to draw his/her picture.
12. If you feel it is needed, rewrite the sentence below the first one, but instead of writing the words for the tools used, draw them instead.

13. Proceed to sentence #2, taking the same steps. The more examples you do together, the more this skill will become familiar to the children. The goal is to help the children practice often until they are able to instantly see items in a series and know to separate them by commas.

Here is what your chart paper might look like:

A natural next step is to have the children make up their own sentences on paper using items in a series that they have correctly punctuated.

<p>I made a picture using <u>crayons</u>, <u>markers</u>, and <u>paint</u>.</p>
<p>I made a picture using  ,  , and  .</p>