

Commas in a list

Commas are used to separate items in a **list**:

I eat carrots, potatoes, beans and rice.

- Notice that you do not need a comma before the first item in the list.
- Notice that the last two items in the list are separated by 'and' so the comma is not needed.

Another example:

I like art, PE, English and drama.

We can also make lists of **actions** rather than **things**:

We were taught how to dive, swim underwater, paddle a canoe and also how to pull ourselves up if the canoe capsized.

We can also make lists of **adjectives**:

She was lovely to look at but inside she was cold, mean, selfish and heartless.

Things to try



- 1 Write a sentence listing 12 things you would one day like to own. You must have a rather long sentence! How might you make it easier for the reader?

You could split it into two or three sentences, or you could group items together and separate the groups with semi-colons (;).

Test yourself



- 1 Put commas into this list.

I like grapes bananas apples and oranges.

- 2 Put commas into this list.

The party games included Pass the Parcel Pin the Tail on the Donkey Musical Chairs and Catch the Apples.

- 3 Why is there no comma between the last two items in a list?
Tick the right answer.

- (a) Because you are only allowed two commas
- (b) Because they are connected by a joining word instead of a comma
- (c) Because the last two items are different from the others

4 Insert commas into this sentence.

The library is open 9 a.m.–5 p.m. on Monday Tuesday
Wednesday Friday and Saturday.

5 Correct the punctuation in this sentence.

I agreed to buy seven ladies', scarves, four pairs, of jeans and a
green, dress.

stretch yourself

1 There is usually no comma before:

	True	False
The first item in a list		
The second item in a list		
The last item in a list		
The next-to-last item in a list		

2 Look at the sentence below and then tick the two correct answers.

The first Olympic Games contained many of the sports we still see today: there were fighting games such as wrestling, sword fights and archery; running games such as the sprint, the marathon and the relay race; jumping games such as the high jump, the long jump and hurdles; and there were violent team games for which we have no modern version.

The commas are in the right places, but what is the job of the semi-colons (;)?

- (a) To break up a long list**
- (b) To stop the writer using more than two commas at a time**
- (c) To show that a new sentence has started**
- (d) To separate different sections of the list**
- (e) To show where there is a missing word**