

Discussion Questions & Activities

- One of the most common questions about commas in a series is whether to place a comma before “and” and the final element in the series. This comma is often referred to as the “serial comma.” The serial comma is often omitted in magazine and newspaper articles; however, many teachers, textbooks and grammar guides advocate its use. Poll students on their opinion of the serial comma and look for examples of when it is and is not used. If there is a preference for use in student work, be sure to emphasize it.
- ELLs may not realize the concept that items in a series should be similar. In other words, nouns should be used with other nouns and adjectives should be used with other adjectives. Ask students to consider the following sentence: “My dog is gray, friendly, and a puppy.” Discuss how the sentence can be edited to make it clear and grammatically correct.

Commas and Independent Clauses*Content includes:*

- What is an independent clause?
- Two independent clauses are often joined with a comma and coordinating conjunction.

Discussion Questions & Activities

- Two independent clauses can also be joined by a semicolon (;). When a semicolon is used, a coordinating conjunction is not necessary. Allow students to practice using this alternative to joining independent clauses. Discuss when it might be helpful to use a comma and coordinating conjunction and when it might make sense to simply use a semicolon.
- There are seven coordinating conjunctions that can be used to join independent clauses: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. A helpful way to remember them is by using the acronym FANBOYS. Share this helpful tip with students. They may even enjoy playing with the words themselves to create their own acronym.

Commas & Coordinate Adjectives*Content includes:*

- Tests for identifying coordinate adjectives:
 - The “and” test
 - Switch-the-order test
- Use a comma between coordinate adjectives that are not joined by the word “and.”

Punctuating Interjections*Content includes:*

- Use of interjections in informal writing situations

(Continued)

- Deciding which punctuation mark to use

Discussion Questions & Activities

- Comic strips have long been known to utilize interjections to convey the feelings of characters. Students can visit www.readwritethink.org/materials/comic/ to create their own comic strips with text. Encourage them to use at least two interjections. Students can print their comic strips and post them in the classroom.

Suggested Print Resources

- Truss, Lynne. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. Gotham Books, New York, NY; 2003.
- Venolia, Jan. *Write Right!: A Desktop Digest of Punctuation, Grammar, and Style*. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA; 2001.

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- owl.english.purdue.edu/owl
The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University provides a variety of resources and instructional materials for students worldwide. Click on “Grammar and Mechanics” for detailed explanations and examples of grammar concepts.
- www.nationalpunctuationday.com
National Punctuation Day is celebrated on September 24, but you can visit this web site every day! Easy-to-understand explanations and examples are included.

TEACHER'S GUIDE**Megan Carnate, M.Ed.**

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TITLES IN THIS SERIES

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**USING END MARKS & COMMAS****Grades 5–12**

Effective communication, in both the classroom and the real world, is important and grammar is a key element of communication. All students should understand how word choice, word order and punctuation work together to express thoughts in a clear and accurate way. *Grammar Tips for Students* is designed as brief mini-lessons that highlight specific grammar topics by using clear explanations and specific examples and by offering useful tests and tips to avoid confusion and misuse.

Because each show contains a series of independent clips, clips can be viewed individually or in groups. Teachers can also choose to show the clips in an order that works for them and their curriculum.



Program Overview

Road signs can be a big help when you are trying to get somewhere, and one wrong turn has the potential to take you in a completely different direction. Grammar has its own set of “road signs”: punctuation marks. This video program is a tip-filled exploration of end marks and commas. It includes a warning to students about the overuse of the exclamation point and also explains why formal and informal writing often have different standards for punctuation. Students will step beyond traditional definitions of these common punctuation marks and investigate examples that showcase the variety of ways in which these marks are used.

Supporting English Language Learners (ELLs)

- ELLs bring to English their own language experiences. The amount and type of exposure ELLs have to the English language can vary greatly. In addition, the ability to read and write in his or her native language can influence an ELL’s understanding of grammar as well as the type of grammar errors made.
- ELLs may not make the same type of grammar errors as native speakers. Native speakers often rely on their ability to determine if a sentence “sounds or looks right.” This is difficult for ELLs. They should be encouraged to practice the tests and tips provided and may benefit from additional teaching and reinforcement.
- While sharing grammar tips with ELLs is helpful, it is also important to develop reading fluency. By exposing ELLs to texts written in English and encouraging them to read extensively, they can increase their comfort and familiarity with the language and how words and punctuation are used.

Vocabulary

abbreviation — A shortened version of a word or phrase. For example, the abbreviation for “Friday” is “Fri.”

comma (,) — A punctuation mark that indicates division in a sentence. A comma can set off a word, phrase or clause.

coordinate adjective — Adjectives used together to describe a noun. The word “and” can be placed between them and their order can be switched without affecting the meaning of the sentence.

coordinating conjunction — A conjunction that connects words, phrases or clauses, such as *and, or, but, so, yet, nor, and for*.

declarative sentence — A sentence in the form of a statement.

exclamation point (!) — An end mark used to show strong emphasis.

exclamatory sentence — A sentence that expresses strong feelings or emotions.

imperative sentence — A sentence in the form of a direction or command.

independent clause — A group of words containing a subject and verb that can stand on its own as a complete sentence.

interjection — A word used for emphasis. “Wow!” is an example.

interrogative sentence — A sentence in the form of a question.

introductory element — A word, phrase or clause that precedes the subject and kicks off a sentence.

period (.) — An end mark used at the end of declarative sentences. A period is also used to punctuate some imperative sentences and abbreviations.

question mark (?) — An end mark that indicates a question.

Using Periods

Content includes:

- Punctuating declarative and imperative sentences
- Punctuating sentence fragments
- Punctuating abbreviations

Discussion Questions & Activities

- This clip is composed of many helpful tips on using periods. Have students summarize what they learned by creating a tip sheet or poster for reference. Leave some space at the bottom for adding new tips.
- Not sure if you have a declarative sentence on your hands? Try placing “It is true that...” at the beginning of the sentence. Remember, the information in a declarative sentence is presented as a statement of fact. If the grammar of the sentence is unaffected, then you have a declarative sentence.

Using Question Marks

Content includes:

- Punctuating interrogative sentences
- Distinguishing between direct and indirect questions

Discussion Questions & Activities

- While direct questions require a question mark, indirect questions are punctuated with a period because they report a question. Provide students with a list of direct questions and have students reword them so they are indirect and punctuated with a period instead of a question mark.
- Investigate how questions are asked and written in other languages. This is a great opportunity for ELLs to take an active role as experts in their native languages. Some students may not realize, for example, that in the Spanish language, a written question starts with an inverted question mark (¿).

Using Exclamation Points

Content includes:

- Punctuating exclamatory sentences
- Using exclamation points with imperative sentences
- Avoiding overuse of the exclamation point

Discussion Questions & Activities

- End marks often tell readers how to read a sentence. Consider this sentence: “We won the contest ___” Have students fill the blank at the end of the sentence with different end marks and read the resulting sentences aloud. See how the end mark influences the delivery of the sentence?
- Discuss why exclamation points are commonly avoided in formal writing situations. List instances when exclamation points would be acceptable and instances when it would be best to avoid them.

Using Commas

Content includes:

- Myth: Long sentences need commas.
- Myth: Insert a comma wherever you pause.
- A single comma can influence the meaning of a sentence.

Discussion Questions

- A single comma can influence the meaning of a sentence. Consider the following two sentences: “Quiet babies are sleeping.” “Quiet, babies are sleeping.” Discuss how the meaning of each sentence differs. Challenge students come up with their own sample sentences to model this concept. Lynne Truss’ *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why, Commas Really Do Make a Difference!* (Putnam Juvenile, 2006) is a fun resource with illustrated examples.

Commas & Introductory Elements

Content includes:

- What is an introductory element?
- When is a comma needed to set off introductory elements?

Discussion Questions & Activities

- Introductory clauses and phrases help to set the stage for the main part of the sentence. Write an introductory clause or phrase on the board. Ask students to complete the sentence. Record their responses and then discuss how the introductory element influenced their choice of words for the sentence’s main clause.

Commas in a Series

Content includes:

- What makes up a series?
- Coordinating conjunctions