Full Stop or Comma? Punctuating a List of Three or More Items in Year 2

A simple guide to help your child in Year 2 (children aged 6 or 7) learn how to use commas to separate items in a list and how to finish their sentences with a full stop.

What is a list in a sentence?

In Year 2, children learn to write longer sentences. Sometimes, they want to list several things, such as a group of toys, colours, or actions. To make these sentences clear for the reader, we use commas. A comma is a punctuation mark (a small dot with a tail) that tells the reader to take a tiny breath. Instead of writing 'I like apples pears and grapes', we use commas to separate the items: 'I like apples, pears and grapes'. This helps the reader understand where one item ends and the next one begins.

How commas and full stops work together

When children write a list, they might be tempted to put a comma after every single item. However, in English, we usually use the word 'and' to join the last two items together, so a comma is not needed right before the 'and'. Once the list is finished and the sentence is complete, your child must use a full stop. A full stop is the mark used at the end of a sentence to show it has finished. The goal is to have commas between the early items, but only one full stop at the very end.

What this means for your child's learning

Your child is learning to proofread their work. Proofreading means reading over what they have written to check for mistakes. In class, your child will be encouraged to count the items in their list and check that the commas are in the right places. This is a natural part of the Year 2 curriculum. Some children may find this trickier than others, especially those with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or those learning English as an additional language. Their teacher will provide the right support to help them progress at their own pace.

Playful ways to help at home

You can practice this in a relaxed way during your daily routine. While shopping, you could say, 'I need milk, bread and eggs,' and ask your child where the commas would go if we wrote that down. You could also play a game while tidying up: 'I can see a book, a pencil and a toy.' There is no need for formal drilling or worksheets; simply pointing out lists in storybooks or chatting about them helps your child notice how punctuation works in the real world.

Common questions from parents

You might wonder if a comma is ever allowed before the word 'and'. While some styles of writing use it, in Year 2, children are generally taught to leave it out. You may also notice your child forgetting the final full stop when they get excited about their list. This is very common! If you are unsure about the specific way your child's school teaches punctuation, the best thing to do is have a quick chat with their class teacher, as some schools use slightly different methods.

Sources

- Department for Education: The National Curriculum in England: Framework for Key Stage 1
- GOV.UK: National Curriculum in England: English programme of study