

Language Conventions: Using Commas

Australian Curriculum

This lesson plan could be used to support the teaching and learning of the following content descriptions from the Australian Curriculum:

Y6: Language: Language for Expressing and Developing Ideas

Understand how to use the comma for lists, to separate a dependent clause from an independent clause, and in dialogue (AC9E6LA09)

Y6: Literacy, Creating Texts

Plan, create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts whose purposes may be imaginative, informative and persuasive, using paragraphs, a variety of complex sentences, expanded verb groups, tense, topic-specific and vivid vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and visual features (AC9E6LY06)

Aim: I can use commas to make sure the reader understands precisely what I am trying to say.	Key/New Words: Comma, clarify, ambiguity.	Resources: Lesson Pack Colouring Pencils
Success Criteria: I can tell when the meaning in a sentence is unclear. I can suggest different meanings that a sentence could have. I can add or remove commas to clarify the meaning of a sentence.	Prior Learning: Using commas to separate items on a list. Using commas after direct speech. Using commas after fronted adverbials and fronted subordinate clauses. Using commas to indicate extra information in a sentence (parenthesis). Using commas to demarcate relative clauses and embedded clauses.	Preparation: Sentence Draw Activity Sheet - one per child Adding Commas Activity Sheet - one per child Make Two Meanings Activity Sheet - one per child Using Commas Mini Test Activity Sheet - one per child Application Activity Sheet as required



Introductory Activity

Show the children a list of sentences that have been punctuated with commas. Ask them to talk to a partner and decide why each comma has been used in each sentence. The last sentence contains a comma that is only needed to clarify the meaning of the sentence. Share and discuss the answers on the next slide.

Check that the children have the required prior learning for this lesson and that they are familiar with the main functions of a comma within a sentence. Check to see if children make any suggestions about the comma in no. 6 being needed to clarify meaning.



Independent Focused Activity

Children use the differentiated Sentence Draw activity sheets to explore visually the difference commas can make to the meaning of a sentence. In some of these examples, a comma may have been used even though there is no grammatical rule that requires it to be there. However, the idea behind the activity is to stimulate discussion about how commas can completely change the meaning of a sentence. Check that children understand how the emphasis in the sentence changes as a result of the comma.



Children to complete the [Sentence Draw Activity Sheet](#) independently.



Children to complete the more challenging [Sentence Draw Activity Sheet](#) independently.



Review Activity

Children use the differentiated Adding Commas activity sheet to read like an editor and decide whether the meaning in a sentence needs making clearer through the addition of commas.

Can the children see how to use commas to place different emphasis on the words and therefore alter the meaning of the sentence?



Children to complete the [Adding Commas Activity Sheet](#) independently.



Children to complete the more challenging [Adding Commas Activity Sheet](#) independently.



Consolidation Activity

[Make Two Meanings Activity Sheet](#). Children use commas to make the same words in a sentence carry two distinct meanings. Check that the children can comment on the different meaning of the sentence they have created.



Assessment

The children complete the [Using Commas Mini Test Activity Sheet](#) in order to test their understanding. The children complete the [Application Activity](#) as required, where pupils will need to apply all of their prior learning on the use of commas.



Adding Commas

I can add commas to clarify the meaning of a sentence.



Read the sentences as an editor and decide if you think commas need to be added. If you decide to add commas, explain your reason for doing so.

Sentence	Explain your reason for adding commas or leaving the sentence as it is.
The rabbit had long sharp pointy teeth.	
As the campers sat round the fire eating the bear stayed in the bushes.	
Lucy wanted a biscuit but she couldn't have one.	
David who was 10 wore glasses.	
Hetty dressed and performed for the packed audience.	
There was lots to do at the fair including face painting and a raffle.	
While the onions were cooking soup was brought from the shop.	
If you have got everything you need then we are ready to go!	
Hanging out the washing is one of the most boring things in the world.	
He was cold without his jacket even though the sun was shining.	



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Read the sentences as an editor and decide if you think commas need to be added. If you decide to add commas, explain your reason for doing so.

Sentence	Explain your reason for adding commas or leaving the sentence as it is.
The rabbit had long sharp pointy teeth.	
While the campers sat round the fire eating the bear crouched just metres away in the bushes.	
Lucy wanted a biscuit but she couldn't have one.	
David who was in year six had lots to say about most subjects.	
Hetty dressed and performed for the packed audience.	
There were a lot of different activities at the fair including face painting and a raffle.	
At the same time as the onions were cooking soup was being bought from the shop.	
If you have got everything you need then we are ready to go!	
Hanging out washing is one of the most boring things in the world.	
He was cold without his jacket even though the sun was shining.	



Read the sentences as an editor and decide if you think commas need to be added. If you decide to add commas, explain your reason for doing so.

Sentence	Explain your reason for adding commas or leaving the sentence as it is.
The rabbit had long, sharp, pointy teeth.	<i>Commas do not change or clarify the meaning in this sentence so there is no correct answer. Commas can be added to provide the reader with mini pauses or left out altogether at the discretion of the author.</i>
As the campers sat round the fire eating, the bear stayed in the bushes.	<i>A comma is needed here to separate the subordinate clause from the main clause and to make it clear that the campers are not eating the bear!</i>
Lucy wanted a biscuit, but she couldn't have one.	<i>In a compound sentence like this, a comma is often used before the conjunction, but it can be written without.</i>
David, who was 10, wore glasses.	<i>Commas are needed here to surround the embedded clause so that the sentence is read correctly.</i>
Hetty dressed, and performed for the packed audience.	<i>The comma in this sentence clarifies the meaning. Without it, it sounds as though Hetty getting dressed is part of the show!</i>
There was lots to do at the fair, including face painting and a raffle.	<i>Although this sentence is correct without a comma, using a comma to signify adding additional information seems to help it read with an extra focus on the individual examples of activity.</i>
While the onions were cooking, soup was bought from the shop.	<i>A commas is needed in this complex sentence to divide the opening subordinate clause from the main clause to avoid confusion – the onions are not cooking soup!</i>
<p>If you have got everything you need, then we are ready to go!</p> <p>If you have got everything you need then, we are ready to go!</p>	<i>A comma is needed here to separate the opening subordinate clause from the main clause in this complex sentence. There are two places where the comma could go and each of them would contribute a slightly different meaning to the sentence. The second one suggests that it has taken some time to get everything together!</i>
Hanging out the washing is one of the most boring things in the world.	<i>This is just a simple sentence which does not require commas – no ambiguity and no further clarification necessary.</i>
He was cold without his jacket even though the sun was shining.	<i>This sentence doesn't need a comma to clarify meaning.</i>



Read the sentences as an editor and decide if you think commas need to be added. If you decide to add commas, explain your reason for doing so.

In these case there may be no clear correct answer but the matter of including commas or not is a suggestion and open to debate and discussion.

Sentence	Explain your reason for adding commas or leaving the sentence as it is.
The rabbit had long, sharp, pointy teeth.	<i>Commas do not change or clarify the meaning in this sentence so there is no correct answer. Commas can be added to provide the reader with mini pauses or left out altogether at the discretion of the author.</i>
Whilst the campers sat round the fire eating, the bear crouched just metres away in the bushes.	<i>A comma is needed here to separate the subordinate clause from the main clause and to make it clear that the campers are not eating the bear!</i>
Lucy wanted a biscuit, but she wasn't allowed to have one.	<i>In a compound sentence like this, a comma is often used before the conjunction, but it can be written without.</i>
David, who was in year six, had lots to say on most subjects.	<i>Commas are needed here to surround the embedded clause so that the sentence is read correctly.</i>
Hetty dressed, and performed for the packed audience.	<i>The comma in this sentence clarifies the meaning. Without it, it sounds as though Hetty getting dressed is part of the show!</i>
There were a lot of different activities at the fair, including face painting and a raffle.	<i>Although this sentence is correct without a comma, using a comma to signify adding additional information seems to help it read with an extra focus on the individual examples of activity.</i>
At the same time the onions were cooking, soup was being bought from the shop.	<i>A commas is needed in this complex sentence to divide the opening subordinate clause from the main clause to avoid confusion – the onions are not cooking soup!</i>
If you have got everything you need, then we are ready to go! If you have got everything you need then, we are ready to go!	<i>A comma is needed here to separate the opening subordinate clause from the main clause in this complex sentence. There are two places where the comma could go and each of them would contribute a slightly different meaning to the sentence. The second one suggests that it has taken some time to get everything together!</i>
Hanging out the washing is one of the most boring things in the world.	<i>This is just a simple sentence which does not require commas - no ambiguity and no further clarification necessary.</i>
He was cold without his jacket even though the sun was shining.	<i>This sentence doesn't need a comma to clarify meaning.</i>

Make Two Meanings

I can use commas to give a sentence two different meanings.



Can you use commas in the following sentences to ensure there are two different ways to read them? Some sentences may just need to be left without commas.

1. The view I imagined was amazing.
The view I imagined was amazing.
2. When the lightning turned incredibly bright yellow people began to get scared.
When the lightning turned incredibly bright yellow people began to get scared.
3. The girl who didn't like spiders was terrified.
The girl who didn't like spiders was terrified.
4. He brought home some old folders and a donut which he ate as soon as he got hungry.
He brought home some old folders and a donut which he ate as soon as he got hungry.
5. Hurry up and shoot grandad.
Hurry up and shoot grandad.
6. David said the astronaut was scared.
David said the astronaut was scared.
7. When she's not working she loves eating her dog and her family.
When she's not working she loves eating her dog and her family.
8. She found to her horror films were boring.
She found to her horror films were boring.
9. Compared to a giant star wars seemed so tiny and small.
Compared to a giant star wars seemed so tiny and small.
10. All the time machines were getting more intelligent and powerful.
All the time machines were getting more intelligent and powerful.

Can you use commas in the following sentences to ensure there are two different ways to read them? Some sentences may just need to be left without commas.

1. The view I imagined was amazing.
The view, I imagined, was amazing.
2. When the lightning turned incredibly bright yellow, people began to get scared.
When the lightning turned incredibly bright, yellow people began to get scared.
3. The girl who didn't like spiders was terrified.
The girl, who didn't like spiders, was terrified.
4. He brought home some old folders, and a donut which he ate as soon as he got hungry.
He brought home some old folders and a donut, which he ate as soon as he got hungry.
5. Hurry up and shoot, grandad.
Hurry up and shoot grandad.
6. David, said the astronaut, was scared.
David said the astronaut was scared.
7. When she's not working she loves eating, her dog, and her family.
When she's not working she loves eating her dog and her family.
8. She found to her horror, films were boring.
She found to her, horror films were boring.
9. Compared to a giant, star wars seemed so tiny and small.
Compared to a giant star, wars seemed so tiny and small.
10. All the time, machines were getting more intelligent and powerful.
All the time machines were getting more intelligent and powerful.



Sentence Draw

I can suggest different meanings a sentence could have.



Can you show the huge difference one comma makes to the meaning of these sentences by illustrating each version or explaining the difference in words? Use colour in your illustrations!

Slow children crossing!

--

Slow, children crossing!

--

Eat Daniel!

--

Eat, Daniel!

--

Look at that blue, bearded man.

--

Look at that blue bearded man.

--



Sentence Draw

I can suggest different meanings a sentence could have.



Can you show the huge difference one comma makes to the meaning of these sentences by illustrating each version or explaining the difference in words? Use colour in your illustrations!

Most of the time travellers take the bus.

Most of the time, travellers take the bus.

Edward tickled the boy with a bunch of carrots.

Edward tickled the boy, with a bunch of carrots.

Now blow up the pipe!

Now blow, up the pipe!

Application Activity

I can use commas to clarify the meaning of a sentence.



1. Can you insert commas into the following passage wherever they are needed to clarify the meaning of the sentences so the passage makes sense?

One day a motorist was driving along humming singing and talking. As he looked out of the window he noticed a sign. 'Slow - Children crossing' it said. "Careful children!" said his wife who was sitting alongside him. Outside he saw clouds a school and children everywhere. Some were already eating friends walking alongside them.

"It's going to be a good day break can't be far off," he said.

"They're off home work to do," she replied.

"They know schools out here in the country," said his wife.

2. Can you make up some sentences that might need commas to clarify their meanings?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

1. Can you insert commas into the following passage wherever they are needed to clarify the meaning of the sentences so the passage makes sense?

One day, a motorist was driving along, humming, singing and talking. As he looked out of the window, he noticed a sign. 'Slow – Children crossing' it said. "Careful, children!" said his wife, who was sitting alongside him. Outside, he saw clouds, a school and children everywhere. Some were already eating, friends walking alongside them.

"It's going to be a good day, break can't be far off," he said.

"They're off home, work to do," she replied.

"They know schools, out here in the country," said his wife.

2. Multiple possible answers.

Using Commas

Commas can be used to ensure that sentences are clear in their intention and meaning as one sentence without comma/s or with comma/s in a different position can have very different meanings.

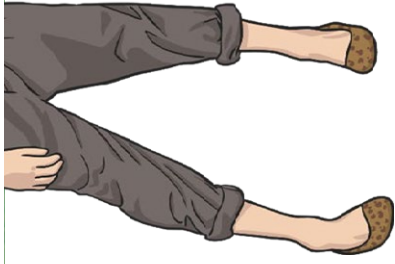
Can you think how commas could change the meaning of this sentence?



Josephine was a pretty tall girl.

Here the absence of a comma invites us to read pretty tall as an adjectival phrase, so we only find out that Josephine is relatively tall.

Josephine was a prettu.



Josephine was a pretty tall girl.

**Josephine was a pretty,
tall girl.**

Here the comma separates
two adjectives describing
Josephine so we know she is
pretty and tall.

We all know that commas can also save lives:

Hurry up and shoot, Grandpa!

Without a comma in this sentence it becomes...

Hurry up and shoot Grandpa!



Using Commas

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Can you think how commas could change the meaning of this sentence?



Josephine was a pretty tall girl.

Josephine was a pretty tall girl.

Here the absence of a comma invites us to read pretty tall as an adjectival phrase, so we only find out that Josephine is relatively tall.

Josephine was a pretty, tall girl.

Here the comma separates two adjectives describing Josephine so we know she is pretty and tall.

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Name:

Date:

10
total marks

Using Commas Mini Test

1. Tick the sentences with meanings which could be changed with the addition of a comma.

- a) She found a mouse trap and cheese all in the bucket as planned.
- b) David had said he didn't care.
- c) The weather was horrible all day so they stayed in.
- d) He asked for money and Lego for his birthday.
- e) Don't risk it Grandma.

4 marks



2. How do commas affect the meaning of these sentences? Explain briefly for each pair.

a) The man dropped the bullet in his mouth.

The man dropped, the bullet in his mouth.

b) Save him, not kill him.

Save him not, kill him.

2 marks



total for this page

3. Add or remove commas to give these sentences the required meaning.

a) Writing, clearly, isn't easy.

Can you add or remove commas in that sentence to make it mean that 'writing so everyone can understand isn't easy'?

b) The criminal said the judge was an idiot.

Can you add commas in that sentence so it says the criminal is an idiot.

c) Debbie's heroes are her parents, Spiderman, and Catwoman.

Can you add or remove commas so that the sentence suggests that Debbie's parents *are* Spiderwoman and Catwoman.

.....

END OF TEST

1 Tick the sentences with meanings which could be changed with the addition of a comma.

- a) She found a mouse, trap and cheese all in the bucket as planned.
b) David had said, he didn't care.
c) The weather was horrible all day so they stayed in.
d) He asked for money, and Lego for his birthday.
e) Don't, risk it Grandma.

4 marks

2 How do commas affect the meaning of these sentences? Explain briefly for each pair.

- a) The man dropped the bullet in his mouth.
The man dropped, the bullet in his mouth.

In the first sentence, the man drops a bullet in his mouth, in the second he is shot in the mouth and falls down.

- b) Save him, not kill him.
Save him not, kill him.

In the first sentence, the instructions is to save the subject of the sentence, in the second sentence the instruction is to kill him!

2 marks

3 Add or remove commas to give these sentences the required meaning.

- a) Writing, clearly, isn't easy.

Can you add or remove commas in this sentence to make it mean 'writing so everyone can understand isn't easy'?

Writing clearly isn't easy.

- b) The criminal said the judge was an idiot.

Can you add commas in that sentence so it says the criminal is an idiot.

The criminal, said the judge, was an idiot.

- c) Debbie's heroes are her parents, Spiderman, and Catwoman.

Can you add or remove commas so that the sentence suggests that Debbie's parents are Spiderman and Catwoman.

Debbie's heroes are her parents, Spiderman and Catwoman.

3 marks

Language Conventions | Using Commas

I can use commas to make sure the reader understands precisely what I am trying to say.		
I can tell when the meaning in a sentence is unclear.		
I can suggest different meanings that a sentence could have.		
I can add or remove commas to clarify the meaning of a sentence.		

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