Teaching 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.a



What You Will Need

- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Lined paper or personal whiteboards
- Pencils, markers, and/or crayons
- Collection of objects (physical or pictures)
- Sample sentences containing items in a series

* Teaching visual from above can be found on page 4.

- 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.

How to Teach

1. To prepare for the lesson, write the sample sentences on chart paper leaving plenty of room between each sentence. You will use this starting in step 10.

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. Use the objects or pictures you collected. The following are examples:
   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, leaving plenty of room between each sentence.

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 AND in each sentence. (See Image 1 on page 3.)

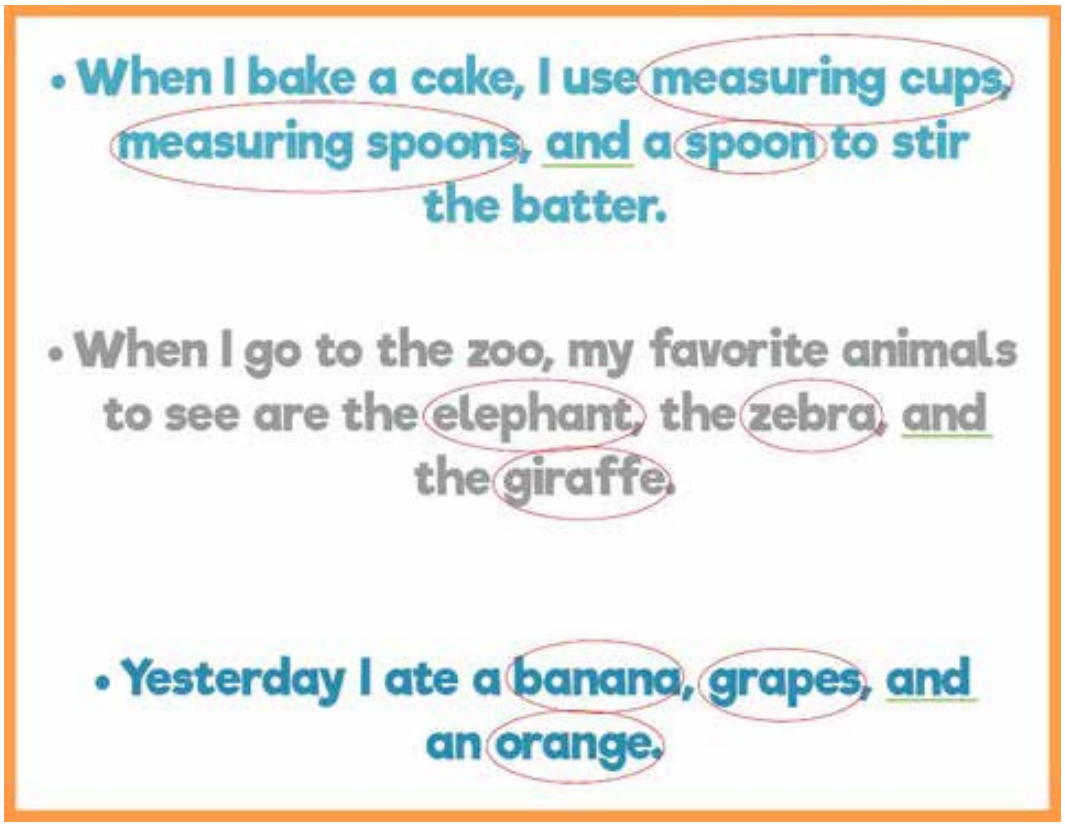
7. Next, ask the children to take turns sharing three items with the class. It could be three animals, three favorite foods, three favorite cartoons, etc.

8. Prompt them to write a simple sentence on their paper or 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, have them circle the items and underline the AND right before the last item. Allow children to share their sentences.

10. Display the sample sentences you prepared earlier. Read the first sentence, "I made a picture with crayons, markers, and paint."

Image 1



11. To prepare for the lesson, write the sample sentences on chart paper leaving plenty of room between each sentence. You will use this starting in step 10. (See Image 2 on page 4.)

12. 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.

13. 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.(See Image 3 on page 4.)

14. 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.





Image 2

I made a picture using crayons, markers, and paint.

Image 3

I made a picture using  ,  , and  .

