

Sentences working together

Objective

Use commas to mark grammatical boundaries in sentences.

Background knowledge

Among other uses, commas can be used to:

- **Separate items in a list:** *I like coffee, cakes, chocolate and oranges.* (See Commas and inverted commas on page 108.)
- **Separate clauses in sentences:** *I left the house, not realising I had no shoes on.* (See below.)
- **Mark out clauses inserted in sentences:** *I left the house, planning to be five minutes, and walked to the bus stop.* (See below.)

Clauses are distinct parts of sentences that say something complete in themselves. In some ways, they are like individual sentences. In the above example, the leaving of the house is a separate fact to the lack of realisation I was shoeless. Similarly, the inserted part of the third example states, separately to the rest, that I planned to be five minutes. Commas can separate off these clauses.

Activities

By Year 3, children are ready to demarcate more within sentences. There comes a stage in their writing at which the stream of words they produce needs putting into separate sentences. Once this target is achieved there is then a need to extend the sentences from within, otherwise children end up with staccato pieces of writing made up of short sentences. Through beginning to use commas, children begin to demarcate within sentences.

- **Photocopiable page 117 'Commas and clauses'**
Once they have read this passage from Anthony Horowitz's *Granny* and investigated the use of commas, children can apply the same idea to other texts. The activity works well with extracts from novels.

- **Photocopiable page 118 'What commas separate'**

This activity can be undertaken using the *Granny* passage on the previous photocopiable sheet.

Alternatively, other sentences can be looked at with a view towards investigating the use of the comma.

- **Photocopiable page 119 'Commas slot bits in'**

The main idea in this activity is the way commas mark inserted clauses. It is as if the insert has pushed the sentence apart, leaving the commas as fingerprints.

Children can return clauses to their places. They can also look at how the sentence can make sense without the inserted clause. They could see whether this rule applies to other sentences they find with inserted clauses.

Further ideas

- **Sentence shading:** Looking at sentences in which clauses are separated by commas, children can try shading over the separate clauses to highlight the different meanings each one carries.
- **Reviewing writing:** Following these activities, children can re-read pieces of writing from the first part of this year and look at sentences they would organise differently. Specifically, they can look for sentences that could have had more complexity to them and in which they could have placed other clauses.



What's on the CD-ROM

On the CD-ROM you will find:

- Printable versions of all three photocopiable pages.
- Answers to 'Commas slot bits in'.
- An interactive version of 'Commas slot bits in'.