how to Serial Comma

Items in a list, or series, are normally separated by a comma when there are three or more ideas in that list.

- *A man and his lovely wife walked into the salon together to get matching haircuts.*
- *Newsweek promises an exclusive interview with Donald Trump, a renowned hair stylist, and an overzealous Democrat.*

In the first sentence, there are only two items in this list, so commas are not necessary to understand that these two elements are separate. In the second sentence, there are three elements, so writers traditionally use commas to break them into smaller, more easily contained ideas.

What is a Serial Comma?

Let’s look once more at that second sentence.

- *Newsweek promises an exclusive interview with Donald Trump, a renowned hair stylist, and an overzealous Democrat.*

Many people write this sentence without the final comma between *stylist* and *and*.

- *Newsweek promises an exclusive interview with Donald Trump, a renowned hair stylist and an overzealous Democrat.*

The second version of this sentence is missing the final comma, and this changes the meaning of the sentence. Instead of having three interviewees, there is only one interview with Donald Trump who is referred to as a hair stylist and a Democrat.

This missing comma is known as the serial comma. It is used to clarify the difference between a list of items or an item with a descriptive phrase and is useful in preventing ambiguity in various sentences. The serial comma is used in MLA, APA, and Chicago Style; however, it is not used in AP.