Commas in a series

Commas are used in sentences to separate a series of words, phrases and clauses to make meaning clear.

Comma rule:
A comma is placed after every word, phrase or clause in a series except for the last two. The conjunction 'and' or 'or' is written between the last two.

Examples:
The price of basic foods like bread, milk and eggs has risen sharply. (words)
Will we find the cleaning products up this aisle, in the next aisle or along the back wall? (phrases)
The shop assistant stacked the shelves, the cleaner washed the floors and the manager checked the stock. (clauses)
We bought pumpkin, two cartons of vegetable stock and a large stockpot in which to cook the soup. (word, phrase and clause)

Comma rule:
If the last two items in a series already have 'and' because they belong together, add a comma before them.

Example:
Foods that are delicious but are not always prepared in a healthy way include hamburgers, sausages, and fish and chips.

Comma rule:
A comma is necessary before a conjunction such as 'and' in a series of items, if omitting it might lead to confusion as to the meaning of the sentence.

Example:
At one of the tables in the food centre we noticed a boy adding salt to his chips, a girl eating a slice of pizza, and a crying baby in a pram.
Note: Without a comma after pizza, it may seem the girl is eating pizza and a crying baby.

Commas in a series

Commas are punctuation marks used to separate a series of words, phrases or clauses in a sentence to make the meaning clear.

1. Read the text about the Indian elephant.

The Indian elephant is one of four subspecies of Asian elephant. The other three subspecies are commonly known as the Sri Lankan, Sumatran and Bornean elephant. The Indian elephant is found in countries such as India, China, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. They live in areas of forest, plains and grass. Elephants have superior hearing, quite poor eyesight, dextrous trunks and large brains. An Indian elephant's diet includes grass, roots, leaves, bark, bananas and sugar cane. Indian elephants are endangered due to habitats being destroyed for logging, humans hunting them for their tusks and habitats being cleared for mining and dam construction.

2. (a) Circle all the commas.
(b) Use a red biro to underline all the lists of words separated by commas.
(c) Use a blue biro to underline a series of phrases or clauses separated by a comma.

3. Add commas where they are needed in these sentences.
(a) I couldn't decide whether I enjoyed visiting the Indian city of New Delhi Kolkata Mumbai or Bangalore the most.
(b) New Delhi has carefully planned colonial buildings wide streets beautiful parks modern offices shopping arcades cafes and restaurants.
(c) New Delhi's population of more than 13 million causes problems with severe overcrowding constant traffic congestion housing shortages and widespread pollution.
(d) The Bengal tiger is India's national animal. It is found in grasslands subtropical and tropical rainforests mangrove regions and wet and dry forests.