

What Is a Series Comma?

There are a number of differences in spelling, punctuation, and style between British and American English. One such difference pertains to the use of the **series comma** in the American style of writing. The series comma is inserted before **and** or **or** and the last element of a series. A series consists of three or more elements (words, phrases, or clauses) with the same grammatical form.

Example 1

British English: We had bread, butter and eggs for breakfast.

American English: We had bread, butter, and eggs for breakfast.

Example 2

British English: The sample was cleaned, dried and melted.

American English: The sample was cleaned, dried, and melted.

If your journal guidelines state that manuscripts should be written in American English, then the series comma should be used, whereas if they state that manuscripts should be written in British English, then the series comma should not be used. However, it should be noted that with the increasing popularity of American English among journals, some British journals have started using a blend of the two styles. For instance, the British Medical Journal specifies that British spellings and American punctuations should be used. In such a case, you will have to use the series comma even if you are using British spellings.