Say you're helping plan a friend's party, and he sends you a text asking you to “bring Bob, a DJ and a clown”. You're pretty impressed. You had no idea Bob was so multitalented. But when the day arrives, it turns out that he's not, and you were supposed to bring three different people. As you and Bob sit at the silent, clownless party, it occurs to you that the confusion could've been avoided simply by using another comma after DJ.

This final comma in a list, placed directly before the main conjunction, such as and, or, or nor, is called the serial comma, or Oxford comma. And it has long driven grammar nerds crazy because even major language institutions can't agree on whether it should be used.

Say (здесь) — скажем, предположим
a text (здесь) — смс
to bring — привести
pretty impressed — весьма впечатлен
multitalented — наделенный разнообразными талантами
to arrive (здесь) — наступить
to turn out — оказываться
to be supposed to do smth — быть должным что-то сделать
to occur to smb — приходить кому-либо в голову, осенять кого-либо
confusion — путаница
to avoid — избегать
a comma — запятая
directly — прямо, непосредственно
a conjunction — союз
a serial comma = Oxford comma — серийная или оксфордская запятая
to drive smb crazy — сводить кого-либо с ума
a nerd — ботаник, фанат
to agree on smth — достигать соглашения в чем-либо, договариваться о чем-либо
Ironically, the Oxford comma is more common in the United States, where it's recommended by the MLA, the Chicago Style Manual, and the US Government Printing Office, though not by the AP Style Book.

In the UK and other English-speaking countries, most style guides do not support the comma's use, with the exception of its namesake, the Oxford University Press. Why not use the serial comma? One of the main arguments is that the conjunction is usually enough to denote a separate entity. And where it's not, like in your ill-fated invite list, changing the order of terms will usually do the job.

Journalists also dislike the comma because it takes up precious space and can make text look cluttered. Sometimes, it can even create confusion of its own. For example, if your friend had asked for “Bob, a DJ and a puppy”, you'd probably figure out that they're three separate beings. Puppies are cute, but they don't make great DJs. With the comma, you may think Bob is the DJ, and all you need is him and the puppy.
The argument over the Oxford comma has raised such strong passions over the years that a sort of truce has been reached. The common wisdom is that its use is optional, and depends on whether it will help to avoid confusion. For one thing, you're supposed to keep your use or avoidance of the Oxford comma consistent throughout a whole piece of writing. So, using it only where necessary is not an option.

And the very idea of a grammatical rule being optional is a bit odd. Imagine that you hadn't messed up the party planning, and read the next day that "everyone had a great time — ninjas, pirates, vikings, old and young". If the Oxford comma were standard, you would notice it missing and conclude that old and young must describe the awesome guests already listed. But as things stand, you will always wonder whether it means that a bunch of regular, boring kids and old people showed up as well.

to raise strong passions — накалять страсти
a truce — соглашение о перемирии
to reach — достигать
common wisdom — общепринятая точка зрения
optional — необязательный
to depend on — зависеть от
for one thing — прежде всего
avoidance — избежание
to keep smth consistent (здесь) — постоянно придерживаться чего-либо
odd — странный
to mess smth up — испортить что-либо
a ninja /ˈnɪndʒə/ — ниндзя
a pirate — пират
a viking /ˈvaɪ.kɪŋ/ — викинг
missing — отсутствующий, недостающий
to conclude — сделать вывод
awesome — шикарный, фантастический
listed — перечисленный в списке
as things stand — судя по всему
to wonder (здесь) — сомневаться
a bunch of — горстка, группа
regular (здесь) — обыкновенный
to show up — объявиться, приходить
Ultimately, the serial comma may be useful or annoying, but your opinion on it, as for many optional things, probably has something to do with whichever style you were raised on. Your high school teachers favored it? It's likely you're still using it. Your first editor hated it? You probably do, too. And maybe so much hairsplitting over a tiny squiggle on a page is a bit silly. After all, there are so many bigger problems to worry about. But sometimes, little things can make a big difference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Russian</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ultimately — в конечном счете</td>
<td>ultimately — в конечном счете</td>
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<tr>
<td>annoying — раздражающий</td>
<td>annoying — раздражающий</td>
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<tr>
<td>whichever — какой бы ни</td>
<td>whichever — какой бы ни</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to raise — воспитывать</td>
<td>to raise — воспитывать</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school — старшие классы</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>likely — видимо, вполне вероятно</td>
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<td>an editor — редактор</td>
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<tr>
<td>hairsplitting over smth — мелочные придирки к чему-либо</td>
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<tr>
<td>tiny — крошечный</td>
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<tr>
<td>a squiggle — завиток, закорючка</td>
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<td>to make a difference (здесь) — иметь большое значение</td>
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