

## PURPOSE

A semicolon [;] is used to connect closely related independent clauses. Semicolons also can separate items in a list when those items include commas.

## RULES AND EXAMPLES

USE A SEMICOLON TO SEPARATE CLOSELY RELATED INDEPENDENT CLAUSES.

Independent clauses include a subject and a verb can stand on their own as sentences.

*I love watching any movie; my favorite films involve space and robots.*

Note:

How writers join independent clauses together in one sentence is a stylistic choice. The sentence above also would be correct if the semicolon was replaced with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*); coordinating conjunctions can be remembered by the acronym FANBOYS.

*I love watching any movie, but my favorite films involve space and robots.*

A comma splice occurs when independent clauses are joined incorrectly. Comma splices can sometimes be corrected by the use of a semicolon.

Comma Splice: *People have feelings, robots have logic.*

Corrected Sentence: *People have feelings; robots have logic.*

USE A SEMICOLON TO SEPARATE INDEPENDENT CLAUSES LINKED WITH A TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSION.

Transitional expressions link ideas in your writing and can help readers understand the logic of your paper.

Conjunctive adverbs (i.e. *however, otherwise, consequently, similarly, finally, furthermore, therefore, thus, etc.*) that link independent clauses are preceded by semicolons and followed by commas:

*I do love going to the movies; however, I can't afford to go every weekend.*

Other transitional phrases separating independent clauses are punctuated the same way:

*I warned people the robot overlords were coming; in fact, I even put up posters all over campus!*

*Remember, semicolons in examples like those above must be preceded and followed by independent clauses.*

USE A SEMICOLON BETWEEN ITEMS IN A SERIES CONTAINING INTERNAL PUNCTUATION.

Items in a series are typically separated with commas. However, when the items being listed are complex and include commas themselves, semicolons are used for separation.

*To prepare my escape from the robot rebellion, I will pack my warm, fuzzy slippers; a pair of large, green space goggles; and my favorite, pocket-sized action figure.*