

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.