

Semicolons

Use a semicolon between independent clauses that are closely related in meaning if they are not joined by *and*, *but*, *for*, *nor*, *or*, *so*, or *yet*, and between independent clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb or transitional expression.

EXAMPLES We found the missing calculator; it was under a sofa cushion. [A semicolon joins the two closely related independent clauses.]
Her shoelace snapped; therefore, her shoe flew off. [A semicolon appears between two independent clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb.]

REMINDER *Conjunctive adverbs* and *transitional expressions* show readers how linked independent clauses are related to each other.

EXERCISE A Each of the following sentences contains two independent clauses. If the sentence is punctuated incorrectly, circle the punctuation mark that should be replaced by a semicolon. If the sentence is punctuated correctly, write C on the line provided.

Examples _____ 1. Some counties are huge. Los Angeles County covers 4,083 square miles of city, island, desert, and seacoast. [A semicolon should join the two closely related independent clauses.]

_____ 2. It's begun to rain. still, the dog wants to go outside. [A semicolon should precede the conjunctive adverb *still*.]

_____ 1. The western sky has reddened, the sun will set within the hour. [Should the independent clauses be joined by a semicolon?]

_____ 2. Beth has finished assembling her solar lawn mower, however, the blades still need to be balanced. [Should a semicolon precede the conjunctive adverb in this sentence?]

_____ 3. It is getting easier to find many forms of wildlife, indeed, even the bald eagle is becoming more common.

_____ 4. Her aunt gave her some potted violets, so she is learning how to grow them.

_____ 5. He's eating fresh cantaloupe, where did he find it?

_____ 6. There are empty boxes stacked in the hallway, we should probably recycle them.

_____ 7. Comets are difficult to discover, yet Dr. Rhodes keeps trying to find one.

_____ 8. Carl's books, papers, and pencils are already lying on the table in the kitchen, in other words, our study group is probably going to meet there.

_____ 9. To reach the doctor's office, go to the fourth floor, the office will be on your left.

_____ 10. The bridge is usually busy with traffic, nevertheless, pigeons nest below it.

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Use a semicolon between items in a series if the items contain commas. A semicolon, rather than a comma, also may be needed to separate independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction when the clauses contain commas that may be confusing.

EXAMPLES Turn in the assignment, your math homework; the art project, if you've finished it; and the final draft of your persuasive essay. [The first two items in this series contain commas, so semicolons separate all the items.]
Ice, lettuce, bread, and drinks should fit inside the chest; and the tent, sleeping bags, and clothes should fit inside the pack. [The two independent clauses contain commas that may be confusing, so they are joined by a semicolon and the coordinating conjunction *and*.]

EXERCISE B Each of the following sentences contains either two independent clauses or a list of items. If the sentence is punctuated incorrectly, circle the punctuation mark that should be replaced by a semicolon. If the sentence is punctuated correctly, write C on the line provided.

Example _____ 1. We know that the tubas, as old, dented, and rusted as they are, have to be replaced, but the trumpets, which are fairly new, well cared for, and shiny, can be kept. [The coordinating conjunction *but* joins two independent clauses containing commas; therefore, a semicolon joins them.]

- _____ 11. Unlike nonliving things, living things move on their own, respond to changes in condition, consume nutrients, and grow and replace parts. [Do the items in the list contain commas that may confuse a reader?]
- _____ 12. On their whirlwind tour of the East, the retirees will visit Orlando, Florida, Richmond, Virginia, and Boston, Massachusetts.
- _____ 13. Three of Oklahoma's natural regions are the Gulf Coastal Plain, a fertile region that spreads along the valley of the Red River, the Ouachita Mountains, a forested area that extends into western Arkansas, and the Central Plains, a grassland prairie that forms the largest region in the state.
- _____ 14. A spokesperson for the San Gabriel Community Center said that they can host the "Build a Better Mousetrap" competition on November 16 or 23, 2004, December 12 or 29, 2004, January 6 or 23, 2005, or February 9 or 16, 2005.
- _____ 15. Artificial turf doesn't require much care, isn't easily damaged, and is unaffected by weather, but its use may lead to certain injuries, cause balls to bounce higher than they would on a natural surface, and raise field temperatures in warm weather.