
Commas vs. Semicolons in Compound Sentences

Brought to you by the Purdue University Online Writing Lab at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

A group of words containing a subject and a verb and expressing a complete thought is called a sentence or an independent clause. Sometimes, an independent clause stands alone as a sentence, and sometimes two independent clauses are linked together into what is called a compound sentence. Depending on the circumstances, one of two different punctuation marks can be used between the independent clauses in a compound sentence: a comma or a semicolon. The choice is yours.

Comma (,)

Use a comma after the first independent clause when you link two independent clauses with one of the following coordinating conjunctions: and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet. For example:

I am going home, and I intend to stay there.

It rained heavily during the afternoon, but we managed to have our picnic anyway.

They couldn't make it to the summit and back before dark, so they decided to camp for the night.

Semicolon (;)

Use a semicolon when you link two independent clauses with no connecting words. *For example:*

I am going home; I intend to stay there.

It rained heavily during the afternoon; we managed to have our picnic anyway.

They couldn't make it to the summit and back before dark; they decided to camp for the night.

You can also use a semicolon when you join two independent clauses together with one of the following conjunctive adverbs (adverbs that join independent clauses): however, moreover, therefore, consequently, otherwise, nevertheless, thus, etc. For example:

I am going home; moreover, I intend to stay there.

It rained heavily during the afternoon; however, we managed to have our picnic anyway.

They couldn't make it to the summit and back before dark; therefore, they decided to camp for the night.
