



Semicolon and Colon Usage

Semicolon

RULE: Use the semicolon to separate certain independent clauses and to separate certain units in a series.

A. Separating independent clauses not joined by coordinating conjunctions.

Use a semicolon to separate two closely related independent clauses that are not joined by one of the **coordinating conjunctions: and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet**.

Examples:

- indep. clause indep. clause
- a. correct: Phyl was the only nurse; the surgeon needed her.
incorrect: Phyl was the only nurse, the surgeon needed her.

- indep. clause indep. clause
- b. correct: The dam broke; the area was flooded.
incorrect: The dam broke, the area was flooded.

- indep. clause indep. clause
- c. correct: The sun had set; lights came on in all the houses.
incorrect: As the sun was setting; lights came on in all the houses.

As the sun was setting is a **dependent clause**. A dependent clause contains a subject and verb unit but cannot stand alone as a sentence. Some other expressions that introduce dependent clauses are **after, although, as if, as long as, because, before, even, if, provided, since, that, though, unless, until, what, whatever, when, whenever, where, which, while, who, whoever, whose, why**.

B. Separating independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions.

Use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses that are joined by a coordinating conjunction when at least one of the clauses is long or contains commas.