

Commas, Semicolons, & Periods

When you want to use commas and semicolons in sentences and when you are concerned about whether a sentence is or is not a fragment, a good way to start is to be able to recognize dependent and independent clauses.

Independent Clause (IC): a group of words that contains a subject and can stand alone as a complete sentence.

Example: Jim only buys bread from the store downtown. **(IC)**

Dependent Clause (DC): a group of words that contains a subject and verb cannot be a sentence. Often a dependent clause is connected to a subordinating conjunction.

Example: When Jim buys bread... **(DC)**

(Incomplete sentence: What happens when he buys bread?)

Subordinate Conjunction (sc)

A subordinate conjunction word is a word added to the beginning of an independent clause that makes it into a dependent clause.

Example: **When** Jim buys bread, he always goes to the store downtown.
(sc)

Common subordinate conjunctions:

- after
- although
- as
- as if
- because
- before
- even if
- even though
- if
- to
- since
- though
- unless
- until
- whatever
- when
- whenever
- whether
- while

Coordinating Conjunction (cc)

The seven coordinating conjunctions used as connecting words are *for, and, but, nor, or, yet, so*, often remembered as FANBOYS because of the first letter. When the second half of a sentence begins with a coordinating conjunction, a comma is needed before the coordinating conjunction:

Example: Jim studied in the Sweet Shop for his chemistry quiz, **but** it was hard to concentrate because of the noise. **(cc)**

Conjunctive Adverb (ca)

A conjunctive adverb word is a connecting word used at the beginning of an independent clause. These words can always begin a sentence that can stand alone. When the second independent clause in a sentence has an independent marker word, a semicolon is needed before the independent marker word.

Example: Jim studied in the Sweet Shop for his chemistry quiz; **however**, it was hard to concentrate because of the noise. **(ca)**

Common conjunctive adverbs:

- also
- consequently
- furthermore
- however
- moreover
- nevertheless
- therefore
- likewise

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Combining Independent Clauses			
Method	Structure		Example
Period	IC . IC.		I went to the store. I didn't buy any bread.
Semicolon	IC ; IC.		I went to the store; I didn't buy any bread.
Semicolon with (ca) and comma	IC ; moreover, ; however, ; consequently, ; indeed, ; nevertheless, ; therefore,	IC.	I went to the store; however , I didn't buy any bread.
Period with (ca) and comma	IC . Moreover, . However, . Consequently, . Indeed, . Nevertheless, . Therefore,	IC.	I went to the store. However , I didn't buy any bread.
Comma and (cc)	IC , for , and , nor , but , or , yet , so	IC.	I went to the store, but I didn't buy any bread.
Combining Dependent & Independent Clauses			
Method	Structure		Example
(sc) at the beginning and comma	DC , IC.		When I went to the store, I didn't buy any bread.
No comma and (sc) at the end	IC DC.		I didn't buy any bread when I went to the store.
Common Errors When Combining & Punctuating Clauses			
Error	Structure		Example
Comma splice	IC , IC.		I went to the store, I didn't buy any bread. X
Run-on	IC IC.		I went to the store I didn't buy any bread. X
Fragment	DC.		When I went to the store. X

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Other Comma Rules

Use commas to separate a non-restrictive or parenthetical element: a part of a sentence that can be removed without changing the sentence's meaning.

Example: I went to the store to buy some bread, which I like to eat in the morning.

Example: I went to the grocery store, Kroger to be exact, to buy some bread.

Use commas after introductory & conjunctive adverbs

Example: Strangely, no one has gone to the store to buy bread.

Example: Likewise, my neighbor went to the store to buy bread.

Use commas between items in a series. *Note:* APA style requires the serial comma before the last item in a series, also called the Oxford comma.

Example: The three reasons for the store closing were expensive prices, poor service, and not enough bread.

But use semicolons between items in a series that already contain commas

Example: I went to the store to buy foodstuffs, such as bread, milk, and eggs; cleaning supplies, such as bleach, sponges, and a scrub brush; and clothes, such as a few new skirts and a blouse.

Use commas to separate coordinate adjectives. Coordinate adjectives are adjectives in a series that can be rearranged in any order, separately modify the noun, and *could be* (but are not) strung together using “and.”

Example: Only one small, smooshed loaf of bread was left behind. (you can separate a “small loaf” and a “smooshed loaf,” and you can write “small and smooshed loaf”)

But not cumulative adjectives

Example: I bought a loaf of whole wheat bread. (you can't separate “whole bread” and “wheat bread,” and you cannot write “whole and wheat bread.”)

Use commas before and after a quotation within a sentence with verbs of attribution

Example: “The introduction of personal shopping assistants,” the store owner said, “is the greatest thing since sliced bread.”

Example: The author stated, “The only two things needed to appease the masses are bread and circuses.”

But not in quotations without verbs of attribution

Example: The health inspector claimed most the bread from that store was “either moldy or stale.”

Use commas to set off geographical names & items in date

Example: The last time I went to the store in Chillicothe, Missouri to buy bread was February 12, 2015.

Use commas with markers of direct address. Words that indicate you are talking to someone (yes/no, the reader's name, question tags, or mild indicators “well” or “oh”)

Example: Yes, I am going to go to the store today to buy some bread.

Example: The bread from that store is quite good, don't you think?

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