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
## Commas, Semicolons, & Periods

### Combining Independent Clauses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Structure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC. I went to the store. I didn't buy any bread.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semicolon</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC. I went to the store; I didn't buy any bread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semicolon with <em>(ca)</em> and comma</td>
<td>IC ; moreover, ; however, ; consequently, ; indeed, ; nevertheless, ; therefore,</td>
<td>IC. I went to the store; <strong>however</strong>, I didn't buy any bread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period with <em>(ca)</em> and comma</td>
<td>IC . Moreover, . However, . Consequently, . Indeed, . Nevertheless, . Therefore,</td>
<td>IC. I went to the store. <strong>However</strong>, I didn't buy any bread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comma and <em>(cc)</em></td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC. I went to the store, <strong>but</strong> I didn't buy any bread.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Combining Dependent & Independent Clauses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(sc)</em> at the beginning and comma</td>
<td>DC ,</td>
<td>IC. <strong>When</strong> I went to the store, I didn't buy any bread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No comma and <em>(sc)</em> at the end</td>
<td>IC DC.</td>
<td>I didn't buy any bread <strong>when</strong> I went to the store.</td>
</tr>
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### Common Errors When Combining & Punctuating Clauses

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Comma splice</td>
<td>IC ,</td>
<td>IC. I went to the store, I didn't buy any bread. ❌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run-on</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC. I went to the store I didn't buy any bread. ❌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragment</td>
<td>DC.</td>
<td>When I went to the store. ❌</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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?