

JOINING TWO INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

The Helpful Handout for the Student Writer

What is an Independent Clause?

A complete sentence containing a both subject and a verb. It can be short and simple or long and complex, as long as it makes a complete statement and can stand alone. When two clauses are joined they form what is called a compound sentence.

How can you join two independent clauses?

Commas indicate a brief pause while connecting similar statements and ideas. A coordinating conjunction must be inserted between the two clauses and after the comma, they are: *and, but, for, or, nor, so* and *yet*.

- *Example:* They may take our lives. They will never take our freedom
They may take our lives, **but** they will never take our freedom. –William Wallace

Semicolons pause longer than commas and restate related ideas with equal emphasis and no change to structure. Semicolons are a definite for joining two independent clauses that already have commas.

- *Example:* Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.
Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much. –Helen Keller

Semicolons and Commas are both used when a transitional word is put between the clauses to oppose or agree with the first. The word is always after the semi colon and before the comma, creating a longer pause. There are many of these words; some examples are *however, meanwhile, furthermore, also, rather, and consequently*.

- *Example:* Always go to other people’s funerals. They won’t go to yours.
Always go to other people’s funerals; **otherwise,** they won’t go to yours. –Yogi Berra

Colons produce longer pauses than commas and shorter pauses than semicolons without the use of any other words. They join two clauses when the second statement explains or emphasizes the first, and are sometimes used directly after an independent clause to begin a list.

- *Example:* Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you are going to get.
Life is like a box of chocolates: you never know what you are going to get. –Forrest Gump

Use the chart below to help you decide which punctuation works the best with your clauses.

USE... IF...	the comma , conjunction	the semicolon ;	the semicolon and comma ; transition,	the colon :
the pause is...	Short	Long	Long	Medium
the second clause...	Shares similar ideas with the first	Links relation with the first	Opposes or agrees with the first	Explains or emphasizes the first
the emphasis is...	Equal for both	Equal for both	In the second clause	In the second clause
there is a list involved...	No	No	No	Yes
there is already a comma...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
the clauses need a conjunction...	Yes (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)	No	No	No
the clauses need a transition...	No	No	Yes (however, otherwise, also, thus, indeed, besides, etc.)	No

Still not sure about joining independent clauses? Try these additional techniques!

Read it aloud: Because the options produce different pauses, one method of finding the right one is by reading the clauses aloud. The timing of the pauses will be instinctive for you (the writer), lending insight into which punctuation to choose.

Write it out: If hearing it aloud doesn't help, try writing down the options. Start with the two separate clauses and continue rewriting each again using the four punctuations, one choice might stand out among the others.

Rewrite: If the options all feel awkward, the best choice may be to rewrite the two original clauses. Writing is a process and sometimes everything needs to be reworked until it fits together perfectly.

Practice your skills by joining the following famous independent clauses together...

- Art does not reproduce the visible. It makes visible. –Paul Klee
- You can put wings on a pig. You don't make an eagle. –Bill Clinton
- Arguments are to be avoided. They are always vulgar and often convincing. –Oscar Wilde
- We didn't land on Plymouth Rock. Plymouth Rock landed on us. –Malcom X