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Semicolons

What is a semicolon?

The semicolon is one of the most avoided punctuation marks because many of us don't really know how to use it – other than to make the winking emoji! ;) It looks like a full stop over a comma.

When should I use a semicolon?

when to use it	example
to make a run-on list clearer	<i>We have stores in three cities: Bangkok, Thailand; Sydney, Australia; and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.</i>
in a vertical list that contains complete sentences	<i>Our brand's core values are:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Providing our customers with great products from sustainable sources. You care about the environment and so do we;</i>• <i>Paying our suppliers fairly;</i>• <i>Embracing diversity with inclusive practices in all areas of our business.</i>
to link two independent clauses that are connected in meaning	<i>Call us for a quote; we'll be happy to speak with you.</i>



Keywords

run-on list: a list of items included in a sentence, not one after another like in a vertical list

clause: a group of words that contains a subject and a verb

An **independent clause** can be a sentence on its own, e.g. ***I love commas.***

A **dependent clause** contains a subject and a verb, but it needs to be attached to an independent clause to make sense, e.g. ***I love commas *because I find the rules really interesting.****



Semicolons in lists

Run-on lists

We usually use commas to divide items in a run-on list, but if a list already contains them, we may confuse our readers:

We serve a variety of food for children, including chicken with fries, salad, and banana, pizza with cheese, ham, and pineapple, and tomato soup.

When we only use commas, it's not really clear that tomato soup is **not** a pizza topping! That's why semicolons can help:

We serve a variety of food for children, including chicken with fries, salad, and banana; pizza with cheese, ham, and pineapple; and tomato soup.

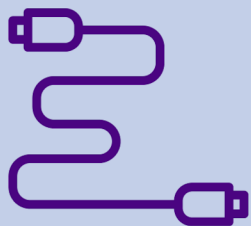


Vertical lists

In a vertical list that includes sentences within the list items, a semicolon acts like a full stop to indicate the end of the sentence while showing our readers that there's more to come.

The refund policy states:

- *Shipping and handling fees are non-refundable;*
- *Items must be returned within 30 days of receipt. Any item returned after this period will not be eligible for a refund;*
- *Items must be unused with tags still attached.*



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Semicolons to link independent clauses

Why should I link clauses?

Linking multiple clauses can make a sentence more interesting for your readers, and using a variety of sentence structures helps your writing flow more naturally.

How do I link clauses?

There are two ways to link **independent clauses** that are related to each other:

1. insert a conjunction (linking word)
*Send us a message, **and** we'll get back to you within 24 hours.*
2. insert a semicolon
Send us a message; we'll get back to you within 24 hours.

Can I link other types of clauses?

You can – but not with a semicolon! We can only use a semicolon when we are able to understand the two clauses independently of each other.

How can I check if my clauses are independent?

Try writing them as two sentences:

- Two independent clauses (can be stand-alone sentences)
Send us a message.
We'll get back to you within 24 hours.

✓ *Send us a message; we'll get back to you within 24 hours.*

- One dependent clause and one independent clause (we need the second clause to be able to understand the first clause)
when you send us a message
we'll get back to you within 24 hours

✗ *When you send us a message; we'll get back to you within 24 hours.*

Do I need to use a capital letter after a semicolon?

No – use a lowercase letter.

Can I use a comma to link independent clauses?

No – use a conjunction or a semicolon instead.

✗ *Send us a message, we'll get back to you within 24 hours.*