



COMMUNITY COLLEGE

OF RHODE ISLAND

Semi-colons

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A Definition of a Semi-colon



A semi-colon can join separate—but similar—ideas into a single sentence.

idea

Independent clause
subject + verb . . .



idea

Independent clause
subject + verb . . .



An Independent Clause

An independent clause conveys one idea that can stand by itself as a complete sentence:

Clouds formed.

All independent clauses must include:

a **subject** (who or what the sentence is about)

a **verb** (action or state of being)

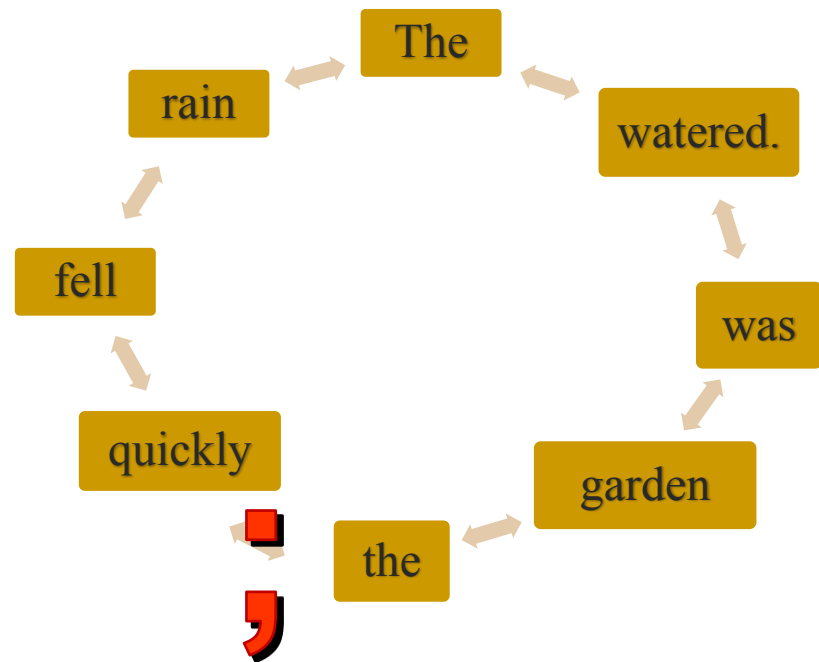
Most independent clauses also have other items, such as **adjectives** and **prepositional phrases**:

Giant clouds formed in the sky.



Semi-colon Placement

Correct placement of a semi-colon between two clauses will show readers the ending of one clause and the beginning of a second one; the result will be a clearer sentence.



Semi-colon Uses

A semi-colon can connect:

- Two independent clauses
- Two independent clauses with a conjunctive adverb or a transitional phrase
- Word groupings containing internal commas

Two Independent Clauses

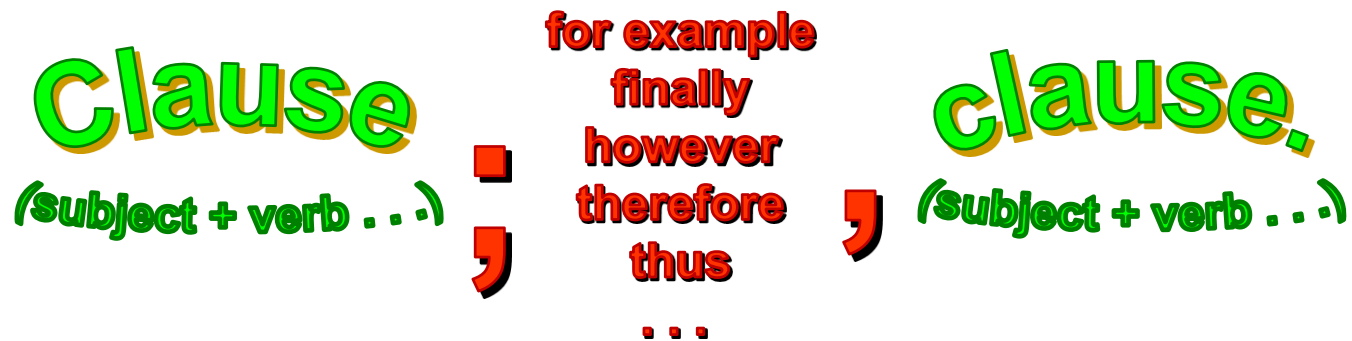
A semi-colon can join two independent clauses into one sentence.

Clause ; **clause.**
(subject + verb . . .) (subject + verb . . .)

The wet leaves on the plants were a deep green color; the vegetables were shiny.

Two Clauses with a Conjunctive Adverb or Transitional Phrase

When two clauses are joined with a conjunctive adverb or a transitional phrase, a semi-colon (or a period) must be placed before the adverb or phrase, and a comma is needed after it.



The rain became a soft drizzle and then stopped; *finally*, a rainbow appeared.

Word Groupings Containing Internal Commas

Groupings of words and phrases sometimes contain multiple commas; semi-colons can show readers what items belong to which group.



The rainbow's bright colors were visible in *Warwick, Rhode Island; Norwich, Connecticut; and Plymouth, Massachusetts.*

A Semi-colon or a Period?

Both semi-colons and periods show readers different ideas (independent clauses) that are being separated from each other.

- Semi-colons separate two ideas while also showing that the ideas are similar enough to be connected together into a single sentence:

The sun shone brightly; its warmth made everyone smile.

- Periods separate two ideas into different sentences. Both sentences should still have such connections as pronouns, transitions, and/or repeated words/ideas; however, a separate idea will be seen in each sentence:

The sun shone brightly. Despite the brightness and warmth, many people were frowning at their wet shoes.

More Information

The Writing Center at the Community College of Rhode Island has more online resources.



Contact Information

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