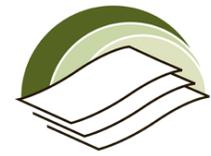


Semicolons



University Writing Center

Semicolons link independent clauses (also referred to as “main clauses” or “complete sentences”) that are closely related and equally important.

Some people complain about Harrisonburg’s **weather**; **I love** its unpredictability.
I always knew what to wear back **home**; **I often** pair shorts with rain boots here at JMU.

Words and phrases like *however, in contrast, on the other hand, in comparison, nevertheless, therefore, consequently, in addition, furthermore, in fact,* and *meanwhile* help clarify the relationship between independent clauses. These words and phrases go after the semicolon and are followed immediately by a comma.

When it snows in Harrisonburg, Port Road is basically a long **ski ramp**; **meanwhile, down in the lowlands, everyone** wonders why classes have been cancelled.
It’s easy to think that the JMU campus is naturally **beautiful**; **in fact, hundreds** of dedicated individuals work to keep the paths clear, the lights on, and the campus safe.

Semicolons solve some common writing concerns; furthermore, they express a complex relationship between closely related ideas with just a single punctuation mark

Increasingly hard to read/more incorrect as it gets longer:

I was worried about directions when I first arrived **at JMU but a few days later I did** not need my campus map.

I was worried about directions when I first arrived **at JMU; ~~but~~ a few days later, I did** not need my campus map.

Incorrect run-on sentence:

I needed a map during my first **week at JMU now I know** every building on campus.

I needed a map during my first **week at JMU; now I know** every building on campus.

Incorrect comma splice:

I needed a **map during my first days at JMU, I soon found myself** offering directions to tourists and prospective students.

I needed a **map during my first days at JMU; however, I soon found myself** offering directions to tourists and prospective students.

Semicolons v. Colons

Link related independent clauses with a semicolon when the second clause is as important as the first:

Sometimes you feel like a D-Hall “Grilled Cheese Sandwich **Thursday**”; **sometimes** you don’t.
Note that the semicolon goes *after* the quotation mark.

Link related independent clauses with a colon when the second clause explains the first.

I love grilled cheese **sandwiches**: **they** are a perfect comfort food on rainy days.

Semicolons with Although and However

“Although” is a *subordinating conjunction*: it begins a dependent clause and either follows a comma or signals that there will be a comma later in the sentence.

“Although” and “however” have similar **meanings**; **although, they** are not interchangeable.

The two words are **not interchangeable, although** they do have similar meanings.

Although the two words have similar **meanings, they** are not interchangeable.

The two words have similar **meanings; although they** are not interchangeable, they are easily confused.



“However” usually functions as a *conjunctive adverb*: it modifies the meaning of an entire independent clause.

“Although” and “however” have similar **meanings; however, they** are not interchangeable.

Semicolons sometimes separate items in a series containing internal punctuation

Normally, commas separate items in a series; however, when the items themselves contain commas, using semicolons to separate them makes the sentence clearer.

During my study abroad trip, we visited the Ponte Vecchio, in **Florence**; the Eiffel Tower, in **Paris**; and the Van Gogh, in Amsterdam.

Lisa just looked **depressed**; Tina was wet, tired, and wearing shorts with **rainboots**; and Jenny was happy because she knew all the buildings on campus.