

Separating Independent Clauses in Compound Sentences

Definitions

Independent Clause: An independent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and verb, expresses a complete thought, and can stand alone as a sentence.

Compound Sentence: A sentence that has two or more independent clauses.

There are four ways to separate independent clauses in a compound sentence:

1. A Comma plus a Coordinating Coordinator (**F**or, **A**nd, **N**or, **B**ut, **O**r, **Y**et, **S**o)
2. A Semicolon
3. A Semicolon plus a Conjunctive Adverb (e.g. therefore, hence, however, thus, moreover...etc.)
4. A Colon

These, however, are not exactly interchangeable: You should choose the method that best suits the meaning in the sentence.

1. Use a comma and a coordinating coordinator to join two independent clauses when you wish to show contrast or relation of two subjects within a compound sentence.
The new house has a large fenced backyard, so I am sure our dog will enjoy it.
2. Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses that are roughly balanced in importance and/or closely associated in meaning.
Road construction in Dallas has hindered travel around town; streets have become covered with bulldozers, trucks, and cones.
3. Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses when the second clause begins with a conjunctive adverb. (Be sure to use a comma after the conjunctive adverb.)
It rained heavily during the afternoon; however, we managed to have our picnic anyway.
4. Use a colon to join two independent clauses when you want to explain, exemplify, or expand on the first.
Road construction in Dallas has hindered travel around town: parts of Main, Fifth, and West Street are closed during the construction.

Exercises

Using one of the methods described above, combine the following pairs of sentences (independent clauses) to create a compound sentence. There may be several correct answers. How many can you find?

1. The early bird gets the worm. The second mouse gets the cheese.
2. The car is full. They will borrow Gavin's truck.
3. The plan is clear. We will leave in the morning.
4. I am going home. I intend to stay there
5. My goal is to become a doctor. I will work especially hard in my science classes.
6. Road construction can be inconvenient. It is necessary

Possible Answers: 1. worm; 2. full; therefore 3. clear: we 4. home, and 5. doctor, so 6. inconvenient, but

(Works Consulted: Purdue Online Writing Lab, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>; Klammer, T. *Analyzing English Grammar*)