

LINKING PUNCTUATION

Your sentences will often contain not one subject-predicate group but several. The individual subject-predicate groups that can make up more complicated sentences are called clauses. Next to end punctuation, the most important kind of punctuation is that of which links two or more clauses.

- (1) When two statements are closely related in meaning, a **semicolon** may replace the period.

Semicolon: Pesticides kill insects; herbicides kill weeds.

The door was locked; the windows were closed.

Eight people voted for the motion; two voted against it.

- (2) Usually words, rather than punctuation marks, indicate that two statements are closely related. For instance, *therefore*, *consequently*, and *accordingly* show that the second statement is a logical conclusion derived from the first. *Furthermore*, *moreover*, *besides*, *in fact*, and *indeed* add clarification or additional information. *However* and *nevertheless* can show that the second statement is true or important even though it may seem different from what went before. All these words are **adverbial connectives** (also called **conjunctive adverbs**). To link the two statements, we use a *semicolon* rather than a period. (A period, however, would still be possible.)

Semicolon: We know our customers well; *therefore*, we do not cash checks.

Period: We know our customers well. *Therefore*, we do not cash checks.

Adverbial connectives can move to different parts of the sentence—like adverbs. Remember that the semicolon stays put. (Note the optional commas that go with the connectives.)

Semicolon: English is required; *therefore*, the students had no choice.

English was required; the students, *therefore*, had no choice.

English was required; the students had no choice, *therefore*.

- (3) Use a comma when two statements are linked by a **coordinator (coordinating conjunction)**: **and, but, for, or, nor, yet, and so**. Notice that in each example the coordinator links two complete clauses, each with its own subject and verb. (otherwise do not use the comma.)

Comma: The clock struck twelve, *and* Miriam left for lunch.

Many are called, *but* few are chosen.

Mr. Snark rode a bicycle, *for* he disapproved of cars.

You must apologize, *or* she will not speak to you again. |

The test was too difficult, *nor* were we ready for it. |

No Comma: at three *and* six
sunny *but* windy
a call *for* you
sooner *or* later

- (4) Use a *comma* or *no comma* as required with **subordinators (subordinating conjunctions.)** Many such words bring into the sentence information about time and place: **when, while, before, after, since, until, where.** Others bring in reason or conditions: **because, if, unless.** The material these words bring in often pins us down to a specific time or situation. It limits or restricts what we say in a very definite way. Such **restrictive** material comes into the sentence without a comma.

Restrictive: Do not say anything *until you talk to your lawyer.* (no comma)
The daughter always called them *when she was in trouble.* (no comma)
He took the children on trips *if their mother agreed.* (no comma)

Nonrestrictive material leaves the main point unchanged. It merely adds optional information that is also true. Use a comma to set off nonrestrictive material, especially after subordinators like **though, whereas, no matter how.**

Nonrestrictive: The working conditions are good, *though the salary is low.*
Mr. Croft went to Florida, *whereas his family stayed home.*
We are canceling the lease, *whether you like it or not.*
We bought the house in May, *after we had paid our taxes.*

When we use a subordinator instead of another kind of connective, we can reverse the order of the two statements. A *comma* then indicates where the main statement starts.

No Comma: He called me *when he was in trouble.* |
Shows are canceled *if their ratings drop.*

Comma: *When he was in trouble,* he called on me. |
If their ratings drop, shows are canceled.

- (5) **Noun clauses** are not added to another statement. Instead, they replace one of its nouns. For instance. Verbs like **know, understand think, feel,** and **wonder** are often followed by a noun clause beginning with **that, who, what, why,** or **how.** Use *no punctuation* between the noun clause and the rest of the sentence: I know what you *think.* I understand how you *feel.*

Noun: I know *the truth*.

Nobody understands *their divorce*.

Noun Clause: I know *that you are my friend*.

Nobody understands *why they separated*.

Explain why each of the following sentences was punctuated the way it was.

1. Prices went up; wages went down.
2. You should not call her during office hours; besides, the line was busy.
3. We cash no personal checks, but perhaps we can make an exception.
4. The meeting had received little publicity; the crowd, accordingly, was small.
5. Your support has helped me very little; in fact, it has hindered me.
6. My brother and I have one thing in common; we both enjoy science fiction.
7. When the planning commission met, angry neighbors protested the decision.
8. Michigan has many lakes and rivers, whereas my own home state has very few.
9. Roses thrive best where water and sunshine are plentiful.
10. You can count on our presence unless you hear from us again.
11. The law restricts the power of trust, for they can force competition out of business.
12. Generosity is not one of Sally's virtues; however, she is not malicious or wicked.
13. Her car had a high list price, but its economical performance made it a good buy.
14. The government supports free enterprise; therefore, it maintains few controls.
15. Myra went to the concert only because she had received a free ticket.