

Semicolons

As confusing as semicolons can seem, there are really only two main ways to use them. Since both ways involve situations that are too strong for commas, try remembering the semicolon as the “super-comma”:

- 1. Use semicolons to link closely connected independent clauses.** An independent clause is a complete thought containing a subject and a verb. If you want to join two closely connected independent clauses into one thought, use a semicolon. (Using only a comma produces a comma splice.)

I am already late for my meeting; I might as well stay at the party.
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- 2. Use semicolons to separate items in a series containing other punctuation.** Commas usually separate items in a series. But what if one or more of the items has a comma inside it? Again, you would use a semicolon to do what a comma cannot:

Anthropology encompasses archeology, the study of ancient civilizations through artifacts; linguistics, the study of the structure and development of language; and cultural anthropology, the study of language, customs, and behavior.

Adapted from Andrea Lunsford’s *The Everyday Writer*, 5th Ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, pp 412–415.