## When to use commas, semicolons, and colons: Putting it all together

## **Commas**

In sentences with two independent clauses (compound sentences):

Use a comma with a joining word to connect the clauses.

Dave didn't feel like cooking dinner, so he decided to order a pizza.

If you use a comma without a joining word, you have created a run-on sentence called a **comma splice**.

If the two clauses in the sentence are short, the comma may be omitted.

He called **and** he placed the order.

In a list:

Use a **comma** to separate items in a list. Include **and** before the last item.

Dave ordered mushrooms, peppers, olives, and pineapple on his pizza.

Use **commas** between items in a list of phrases.

Dave surfed the internet, read some articles, and answered emails while he waited.

Separating introductory words, phrases, and clauses:

Use a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or clause.

Dave, what did you order on your pizza?

The last time Dave ordered pizza, he got different toppings.

When he calls the pizza place, the employees recognize his voice right away.

Setting off descriptive information:

Use **commas** if the added information is **non-essential**.

Dave, who had worked hard all day, waited anxiously for his pizza.

Do not use commas if the added information is **essential**.

The driver who delivered the pizza arrived early and got a generous tip.

## Semicolons (;)

When joining two independent clauses:

Use a **semicolon** when clauses are connected in meaning.

Dave orders pizza a lot; he doesn't like to cook.

Use a **semicolon** when the 2<sup>nd</sup> clause begins with a transitional word or phrase.

Dave has many excuses for not cooking; **for one thing**, he hates doing dishes.



Notice that the transitional phrase is followed by a comma.

In a series:

Use a **semicolon** to separate items that already contain commas.

He has tried pizza from Chicago, Illinois; New York, New York; and Rome, Italy.



Do not use a semicolon to introduce a quotation. Use a comma instead.

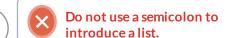
My boss told me, "You're really going places."

## Colons (:)

In independent clauses:

Use a **colon** to introduce a list of items.

Pizzas come in these sizes: small, medium, large, and extra-large.



Use a colon to join two clauses when the  $2^{nd}$  adds an explanation.

The basic rule for delivering pizza is simple: if it's not there in 30 minutes then it's free.