

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

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

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

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.

 Do not use a semicolon to introduce a list.

Use a **colon** to join two clauses when the 2<sup>nd</sup> adds an explanation.

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