

Grades 9–10 Playlist: Semicolons

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.A*:

- Use a semicolon (and perhaps a conjunctive adverb) to link two or more closely related independent clauses.

Welcome

The semicolon is a very useful punctuation mark; it can link closely related independent clauses. The previous sentence could have been written as two separate sentences, but because the two independent clauses are closely related, the semicolon links them to show how the idea in the second clause explains or gives more information about the idea in first clause. Effective use of the semicolon is often an important part of good writing.

Watch!

This video briefly and clearly explains how to use the semicolon:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/when-to-use-a-semicolon/69918>

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- use a semicolon to link two or more closely related independent clauses.
- use a semicolon along with a conjunctive adverb to link two or more closely related independent clauses.

Review

Key Terms

- A **semicolon (;)** is a punctuation mark that can be used to separate independent clauses in a sentence.
- An **independent clause** is a group of words that includes a subject and a predicate.
- A **conjunctive adverb** is an adverb that can be used along with a semicolon to join together two independent clauses in a sentence.

Exploring the Standard

The most common use of the semicolon is to link two closely related independent clauses. For example:

It takes a long time to drive across the country. It's faster to fly.



These two sentences are independent clauses that contain closely related subject matter: ways to travel across the country. They can be linked using a semicolon:

It takes a long time to drive across the country; it's faster to fly.

Practice using a semicolon to link these pairs of independent clauses:

1. The Wildcats won the game. The score was 6-2.
2. You look tired. You should get some rest.
3. My friend is a mechanic. She fixes cars.
4. The president said that the effect of diplomacy was debatable, but he would continue to try. He wanted to avoid war at all costs.
5. To maintain their illusions, magicians must be skilled at sleight of hand. If they are clumsy, they might give away their secrets.

Now look at the revised sentences:

1. **Revision:** The Wildcats won the game; the score was 6-2.
2. **Revision:** You look tired; you should get some rest.
3. **Revision:** My friend is a mechanic; she fixes cars.
4. **Revision:** The president said that the effect of diplomacy was debatable, but he would continue to try; he wanted to avoid war at all costs.
5. **Revision:** To maintain their illusions, magicians must be skilled at sleight of hand; if they are clumsy, they might give away their secrets.

A Closer Look: Using a Conjunctive Adverb

Conjunctive adverbs show relationships between independent clauses. For example, they can signal cause and effect, contrast, or sequence. Here are some common conjunctive adverbs:

| | | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|---------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| also | equally | however | likewise | nevertheless | therefore |
| besides | furthermore | indeed | meanwhile | otherwise | thus |
| consequently | hence | instead | moreover | similarly | still |



Teaching Notes: Semicolons

The goal of L.9-10.2.A is for student to know how to use a semicolon to link two or more closely related independent clauses. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Using a Semicolon to Separate Items in a List

Although it is not included in L.9-10.2.A, as mentioned in some of the external resources included in this playlist, a semicolon can also be used to separate items in a list that would normally be separated by commas. This is done when the items themselves contain commas. For example:

I have family members who live in Richmond, Virginia; Orlando, Florida; and Seattle, Washington.

In this example, because each city is separated from its state using a comma, the items in the list are separated using semicolons.

Overuse of Semicolons

When a writer knows how to use the semicolon, it can be tempting to overuse it. Even if two independent clauses are related, they do not always need to be linked with a semicolon. If the clauses are already lengthy, linking them to create one very long sentence is not always wise. For example:

He had already traveled all the way from Little Rock to Albuquerque that day, and he did not feel like driving to Los Angeles that evening; he decided to stop for the night and get some rest before facing the rest of the journey.

This is a very long sentence, and it would be easier to read if it were split into two sentences:

He had already traveled all the way from Little Rock to Albuquerque that day, and he did not feel like driving to Los Angeles that evening. He decided to stop for the night and get some rest before facing the rest of the journey.

Additional Teaching Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching L.9-10.2.A:

- **“Every Punctuation Mark Matters”**: This lesson plan teaches semicolons in the context of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”:
<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/every-punctuation-mark-matters-260.html>
- **“How to Use a Semicolon”**: This animated video describes how semicolons can be used effectively:
<http://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-to-use-a-semicolon-emma-bryce>

