

Punctuating Complete Thoughts

What happens when one complete thought ends and another begins?

To answer that question, let's first define what a **complete thought** is in written academic English.

SUBJECT + **VERB** (OBJECT OPTIONAL)

You have three basic options:

<i>the period</i>	.
<i>the semicolon</i>	;
<i>the comma with a coordinating conjunction</i>	, for , and , nor , but , or , yet , so or fanboys

How do you know which one to choose?

Use these simple guidelines to make your choice.

A **period** indicates to the reader that a new thought has ended and a new one is beginning. There's no implied relationship between the two complete thoughts. In the reader's mind, there is a noticeable beginning and ending requiring a pause.

I like cats. I like dogs.

A **semicolon** indicates to the reader that the thoughts are somehow related; the relationship may or may not be obvious. In the reader's mind, there is a noticeable relationship between the two thoughts that may require a brief pause to decode.

I like cats; I like dogs.

I like cats; however, I also like dogs.

*Note that a comma is required after the transition word.

Those transition words allow the reader to predict the relationship between the two ideas.

A **comma followed by a coordinating conjunction** indicates to the reader that the thoughts are directly related, and the relationship, in the reader's mind, requires little pause to decode.

I like cats, **for** I like dogs.

I like cats, **and** I like dogs.

I don't like cats, **nor** do I like dogs.

I like cats, **but** I also like dogs.

I like cats, **or** I like dogs.

I like cats, **yet** I like dogs.

I like cats, **so** I like dogs.