

28 Sentence boundaries, colons and nonessential information

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 13 marks

KEY WORDS independent clause • sentence boundary
 • comma splice • modifier • colon

Objective

- Distinguish independent and dependent clauses before choosing punctuation
- Join complete clauses without a comma splice
- Place colons and paired punctuation according to sentence structure

Original public practice; marks below are classroom self-check points, not official criteria.

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

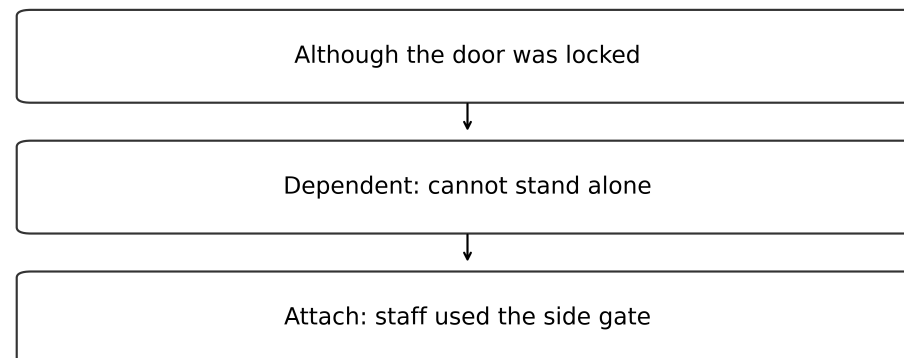
An independent clause has a subject and finite predicate and can stand as a sentence. A dependent clause introduced by although, because or when cannot stand alone in that role. Identify the clause structure before choosing punctuation; a long clause is not necessarily complete and a short one may be.

Two independent clauses can be separated by a period or semicolon, or joined with a comma and coordinating conjunction such as and or but. A comma alone creates a splice. A conjunctive adverb such as however does not replace the coordinating conjunction: use “The test was brief; however, it was demanding.”

A colon can introduce an explanation, example or list after a complete independent clause. Do not place it between a verb and its direct object or after a preposition introducing its object. “The box contains three tools: a ruler, a compass and a square” has a complete introductory clause; “The tools include: a ruler...” improperly interrupts the include construction.

Nonessential material can be enclosed by matching commas, dashes or parentheses, while essential identifying material should not be separated in that way. Removing a nonessential insertion leaves the core sentence intact. Watch both boundaries of an insertion and avoid placing a comma between the subject and main verb merely because the subject is long.

A sentence boundary depends on clause structure. “Although the door was locked” is dependent; attach it to a complete clause. “Although the door was locked, staff could enter through the side gate.” A colon follows a complete introductory clause: “Staff used one entrance: the side gate.”



Worked steps: Although the door was locked → Dependent: cannot stand alone → Attach: staff used the side gate

Worked example. Original: “The catalogue was incomplete; however, the surviving entries were useful.” Both clauses are complete; the semicolon separates them and however is followed by a comma. “The team chose one method: a supervised trial” uses a colon after a complete clause. “The catalogue, revised last year, includes new photographs” encloses a removable modifier with two commas.

■ Practice material

Editing passage. Although the old station was closed [1] its clock still worked. The mechanism was simple [2] however, repairing the hands required a specialist. One part needed replacement [3] the narrow axle behind the dial. The clock [4] which stood above the entrance [5] had become a meeting point. For this exercise there is one clock, and the which-clause adds nonessential information.

2 Practice

2.1 Choose a correct boundary: “The trial ended____ the team reviewed the data.” [1]

- A ;
- B ,
- C : and
- D however

2.2 Which colon use is correct? [1]

- **A** The site was: the old station.
- **B** The team selected one site: the old station.
- **C** The team selected: the old station.
- **D** The team worked at: the old station.

2.3 A punctuation mark that can join two complete clauses without a conjunction is a _____. [1]

2.4 Every comma in a sentence marks a complete clause boundary. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

Use the complete original case context in section 1.

3.1 Supply punctuation at [1]–[5]. Give at least two valid boundaries at [2] and explain the clause test. [3]

3.2 Explain why “One part needed: a replacement” differs from the valid colon sentence in the passage. [3]

3.3 Repair “The clock, above the entrance, and the bell was restored” while preserving the two restored objects. Explain agreement and any optional punctuation. [3]

Solutions

Accept equivalent correct methods and supported interpretations. The marks check reasoning; they are not an official grade.

2.1 A – A semicolon joins these two independent clauses without a conjunction. B creates a comma splice; C combines a colon and conjunction inappropriately here; D lacks the boundary punctuation needed before a conjunctive adverb.

Correct response linked to the given case.

2.2 B – Option B has the complete clause “The team selected one site” before the colon. A and C split a verb from its complement; D splits a preposition from its object. A and C separate a verb from its complement; D separates a preposition from its object. Only B has a complete introductory clause.

Correct response linked to the given case.

2.3 semicolon – A semicolon can separate closely related independent clauses.

Correct response linked to the given case.

2.4 False – Commas also separate items or set off nonessential material.

Correct response linked to the given case.

3.1 [1] comma attaches the introductory dependent clause. [2] semicolon or full stop, because the mechanism clause and repairing clause are independent; capitalise However after a full stop. [3] colon follows the complete clause “One part needed replacement” and introduces the part. [4],[5] paired commas mark the specified nonessential clause; matching dashes or parentheses also work.

Sound conclusion or proposed method. Relevant supporting steps or textual evidence
. Accurate conditions, checks or qualification.

3.2 Needed directly requires its object “a replacement”; placing a colon there interrupts that grammatical unit. In “One part needed replacement: the narrow axle”, the independent clause is already complete and the explanation follows.

Sound conclusion or proposed method. Relevant supporting steps or textual evidence.
Accurate conditions, checks or qualification.

3.3 “The clock above the entrance and the bell were restored.” The compound subject takes were. Commas around “above the entrance” could be used if it is supplementary rather than identifying; that contextual choice does not change the compound agreement.

Sound conclusion or proposed method. Relevant supporting steps or textual evidence.
Accurate conditions, checks or qualification.