Semicolons link independent clauses (also referred to as “main clauses” or “complete sentences”) that are closely related and equally important.

Some people complain about Harrisonburg’s weather; I love its unpredictability. I always knew what to wear back home; I often pair shorts with rain boots here at JMU.

Words and phrases like however, in contrast, on the other hand, in comparison, nevertheless, therefore, consequently, in addition, furthermore, in fact, and meanwhile help clarify the relationship between independent clauses. These words and phrases go after the semicolon and are followed immediately by a comma.

When it snows in Harrisonburg, Port Road is basically a long ski ramp; meanwhile, down in the lowlands, everyone wonders why classes have been cancelled. It’s easy to think that the JMU campus is naturally beautiful; in fact, hundreds of dedicated individuals work to keep the paths clear, the lights on, and the campus safe.

Semicolons solve some common writing concerns; furthermore, they express a complex relationship between closely related ideas with just a single punctuation mark

Increasingly hard to read/more incorrect as it gets longer:

I was worried about directions when I first arrived at JMU but a few days later I did not need my campus map.

Incorrect run-on sentence:

I needed a map during my first week at JMU now I know every building on campus.

Incorrect comma splice:

I needed a map during my first days at JMU, however, I soon found myself offering directions to tourists and prospective students.
Semicolons v. Colons

Link related independent clauses with a semicolon when the second clause is as important as the first:

Sometimes you feel like a D-Hall “Grilled Cheese Sandwich Thursday”; sometimes you don’t. Note that the semicolon goes after the quotation mark.

Link related independent clauses with a colon when the second clause explains the first.

I love grilled cheese sandwiches: they are a perfect comfort food on rainy days.

Semicolons with Although and However

“Although” is a subordinating conjunction: it begins a dependent clause and either follows a comma or signals that there will be a comma later in the sentence.

“Although” and “however” have similar meanings; although, they are not interchangeable.

The two words are not interchangeable, although they do have similar meanings. Although the two words have similar meanings, they are not interchangeable.

The two words have similar meanings; although they are not interchangeable, they are easily confused.

“However” usually functions as a conjunctive adverb: it modifies the meaning of an entire independent clause.

“Although” and “however” have similar meanings; however, they are not interchangeable.

Semicolons sometimes separate items in a series containing internal punctuation

Normally, commas separate items in a series; however, when the items themselves contain commas, using semicolons to separate them makes the sentence clearer.

During my study abroad trip, we visited the Ponte Vecchio, in Florence; the Eiffel Tower, in Paris; and the Van Gogh, in Amsterdam.

Lisa just looked depressed; Tina was wet, tired, and wearing shorts with rainboots; and Jenny was happy because she knew all the buildings on campus.