



Semicolons

Definition: The semicolon is used to separate structurally equal parts/units (independent clauses) when the ideas are closely related.

When to use semicolons:

1. Use a semicolon to connect two independent clauses that convey parallel or contrasting information, but are not joined by a coordinating conjunction.

Ex: The yard work is finished; I can finally go inside.

Ex: Knitting is a pastime enjoyed by many; knitting needles are currently in high demand.

2. Use a semicolon between two independent clauses when the second clause is introduced by a transitional word or phrase, or use it before a conjunctive adverb (both elements are followed by a comma).

Common transitional phrases: *after all, as a matter of fact, as a result, for example, in addition, in conclusion, in other words, on the contrary, on the other hand, and so on...*

Common conjunctive adverbs: *also, consequently, conversely, finally, furthermore, hence, however, meanwhile, moreover, nevertheless, nonetheless, otherwise, similarly, subsequently, therefore, thus, and so on...*

Ex: Collin had a wonderful idea; **however**, the boss vetoed it.

Ex: I didn't know what time it was; **otherwise**, we wouldn't have been late for the party.

Ex: Laurie has published many novels; **in addition**, she has her own company.

3. Use semicolons between items in a series when one or more of these items contain commas (internal punctuation).

Ex: I have lived in Omaha, Nebraska; Litchfield, Connecticut; and Mason City, Iowa.

Ex: Luann saw Peter, who was looking at his watch; Kulani, who was grabbing her keys; and Matilda, who was pretending not to see her.

Ex: My uncle, Henry Phillip III, is the best violinist I've ever met; he is incredibly innovative and can compose new music in fifteen minutes, but he doesn't like to be bothered when he is working.

When not to use semicolons:

1. Don't use semicolons with coordinating conjunctions-FANBOYS (**use conjunctive adverbs**) when sentences are short.

Ex: My cousin's nails are magnificent indeed; **but** I have no desire to groom them. (Incorrect.)

Ex: My cousin's nails are magnificent indeed; **nevertheless**, I have no desire to groom them. (Correct.)

2. Don't use semicolons between a dependent and an independent clause.

Ex: No one applied for the job; **even though it was advertised extensively.** (Incorrect.) The highlighted section is a dependent clause and cannot stand alone.

No one applied for the job, even though it was advertised extensively (Correct.)

Ex: The cake wasn't baking in the oven; despite what the chef said. (Incorrect.)

The cake wasn't baking in the oven, despite what the chef said. (Correct.)

3. Don't use semicolons to introduce a list (**use a colon instead**).

Ex: When Marta left the house, she had with her three things; her purse, her glasses, and her pepper spray. (Incorrect.)

When Marta left the house, she had with her three things: her purse, her glasses, and her pepper spray. (Correct.)

YouTube Links:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXaAVc3PQKQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g384KO4Y7Rs>

Online resources:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/engagement/2/1/44/>

<http://theoatmeal.com/comics/semicolon>

<http://writersrelief.com/blog/2008/03/three-essential-semicolon-rules/>