

The Semicolon ;

The semicolon (;) separates two clauses of equal importance in a sentence. It is sometimes used to separate items in a series. The following list explains when and where to use semicolons.

1. Joining two main clauses

Use a semicolon when two main clauses in a sentence **are not** joined by *and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet* or another joining word.

Example

Most American schools offer only English education programs; schools in Canada provide both English and French immersion programs.

2. Joining two clauses with a transitional expression

Use a semicolon between independent clauses linked with a transitional expression. *Transitional expressions* can be conjunctive adverbs such as also, anyway, besides, still, otherwise, then, therefore, however. They can also be *transitional phrases* such as, after all, as a result, even so, in addition, in other words.

Example

I practiced all the kicks that the instructor taught; however, I never really learned to fight.

If a transitional expression is placed in the middle or at the end of the second clause, the semicolon goes between the clauses.

Example

Most students learned how to fight; I, however, only learned how to kick.

3. Separating items in a series

Use a semicolon between items in a series containing internal punctuation. By inserting semicolons at the major breaks, the writer helps the reader sort out the major groupings.

Example

Classic American novels are *Huckleberry Finn*, with the irrepressible Huck and his friend Jim; *The Great Gatsby*, with the mysterious Jay Gatsby and the beautiful Daisy; and the *Catcher in the Rye*, with the complex Holden Caulfield.

Check out these websites:

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_commacomp.html

From the Purdue Online Writing Lab

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/Semicolons.html>

From the University of Wisconsin at Madison.