

Semicolons



Adapted from *The Little, Brown Handbook*, 11th Edition, Contributors Dayne Sherman, Jayetta Slawson, Natasha Whitton, and Jeff Wiemelt, 2010, 443-450. Prepared by the Southeastern Writing Center. Last updated July, 2011.

A **semicolon (;)** indicates a stronger pause than a comma, but a weaker pause than a period. The semicolon is used specifically to indicate that two thoughts or ideas are related or connected.

To separate items of equal grammatical weight

A. *Independent clause; independent clause*

Use a semicolon to separate and connect two independent clauses that are not joined by a coordinating conjunction.

Example: Sara cannot ride a horse; I know she would like to learn.

B. *Phrase; phrase*

Use a semicolon to separate one phrase from another when the phrases contain additional punctuation marks. The semicolon will help avoid confusion between the punctuation marks.

Example: The MLA workshop taught the basics of MLA documentation, including how to cite printed books, online journals, and interviews; how to compile a works cited page; and how to format and cite block quotes.

C. *Item in a list; item in a list; item in a list*

Use a semicolon to separate one item in a list from another when the items listed contain commas or additional punctuation marks. The semicolon will help avoid confusion between the punctuation marks.

Example: John enjoys watching *Star Wars I: The Phantom Menace*; *Twilight Zone-The Movie*; and *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*.

To join independent clauses with conjunctive adverbs and expressions

Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb (*however, therefore, nevertheless, moreover, furthermore, and subsequently*). In general, a conjunctive adverb is followed by a comma.

Example: Many students refused to present their final projects; **therefore**, they failed the course.

Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses connected by transitional words or phrases (*indeed, in fact, at any rate, for example, and on the other hand*). In general, the transitional expression is followed by a comma.

Example: The new shopping mall is expected to increase the number of jobs in the community; **in fact**, economists predict it will triple the number of jobs currently available.