

Using Semicolons

What is a semicolon?

A semicolon is a mechanical tool used to connect two strongly related, equally important phrases or clauses. The semicolon may also be used to separate word groups or lists when the comma causes confusion.

Use semicolons...

⇒ **To connect two independent clauses**

Think of independent clauses as complete thoughts or sentences. Independent clauses may be connected by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (, and) or a semicolon. Connecting two independent clauses with a comma *only* is considered *comma splice*.

⇒ **To connect two independent clauses that contain conjunctive adverbs or transitional expressions**

Sometimes to clarify the relationship between two independent clauses, conjunctive adverbs (*however*) or transitional expressions (*in addition*) are used. A comma will always follow the additional words.

⇒ **To separate groups of words in a series or list**

Lists of three or more items are normally separated by commas. However, sometimes an item in a series already contains a comma. In order to avoid confusion, a semicolon should be used in place of the comma.

Semicolons look like...

- *I can't decide on a minor, I haven't chosen a major yet.*

-
- *I can't decide on a minor; I haven't chosen a major yet.*

- *Julie practiced her speech for over a week, as a result she won the speaking competition.*

-
- *Julie practiced her speech for over a week; as a result, she won the speaking competition.*

- *Members of the Board of Directors include John Adams, President of Ontop, Inc., Susan Drew, Marketing Director for the System Time Company, an unnamed executive from Incorp Industries, and three members-at-large, chosen by the stockholders.*

-
- *Members of the Board of Directors include John Adams, President of Ontop, Inc.; Susan Drew, Marketing Director for the System Time Company; an unnamed executive from Incorp Industries; and three members-at-large, chosen by the stockholders.*