

Semicolons

Semicolons are used to join two sentence elements where each of the elements could stand as a complete sentence on its own; both of these sentence elements have their own subjects and verbs. Use a semicolon instead of a period to indicate specific relationships between the two elements.

-Use a semicolon to **join 2 complete sentences** when the second sentence restates the first or when the two parts are of equal emphasis and there is NO coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS).

We worked hard on the project; it took a great deal of time.

(The second part basically restates the first part.)

It had stormed the night before; tree limbs and branches covered the road.

(Both parts of this statement are of equal importance; the second part relates to but does not restate the first.)

-Use a semicolon to **join 2 complete sentences** when the second sentence begins with a **conjunctive adverb** (however, therefore, moreover, furthermore, thus, meanwhile, instead, nonetheless, otherwise) or a **transition** (in fact, for example, that is, for instance, in addition, in other words, on the other hand, even so).

They would have a hard time affording a house; **instead**, they rented one.

The stray dog had a lot of fleas; **otherwise**, he was perfectly healthy.

FYI: The rules for commas apply to both of the sentences joined by a semicolon.

-Use a semicolon **between elements in a list** of three or more when those elements have commas in them already.

We visited Venice, Italy; Paris, France; and London, England.

Practice Exercises:

1) Incorrect: I like writing, it is easier than I thought.

Explanation: There are two parts to the sentence that could stand alone. Joining them with a comma makes a **comma splice**. Fix the sentence by using a semicolon because the two parts are directly related.

Corrected: I like writing; it is easier than I thought.

2) Incorrect: I hate writing, however I understand it is necessary in life.

Explanation: There are two parts of a sentence that are linked with the conjunctive adverb “however.”

We need a semicolon to avoid a comma splice or a run-on sentence.

Corrected: I hate writing; however, I understand it is necessary in life.

3) Incorrect: I enjoy writing classes: the teachers are nice, which is helpful, the students are friendly, which is enjoyable, and the work is not too hard, which is exciting.

Explanation: It is unclear what the elements of the list are because they contain their own commas.

Corrected: I enjoy writing classes: the teachers are nice, which is helpful; the students are friendly, which is enjoyable; and the work is not too hard, which is exciting.