

Semicolons can be used in three different ways:

1. Place a semicolon between closely related independent clauses not joined with a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*).

- Use the semicolon this way when the two independent clauses are linked closely enough that you do not want to separate them with a period. But joining them with a coordinating conjunction is unnecessary because the relationship is already clear.

Examples:

- “Do not ask me to be kind; just ask me to act as though I were.” -Jules Renard
- “Wit has truth in it; wisecracking is simply calisthenics with words.” -Dorothy Parker

2. Use a semicolon between independent clauses linked with a transitional expression.

- Examples of transitional expressions: however, therefore, nonetheless, subsequently, then, accordingly, also, anyway, for example, in other words, on the other hand, etc.

Examples:

- I do not like sausage patties; however, I like sausage links.
- There are five black cats in our backyard; therefore, we cannot get our dog to come inside.

3. Use semicolons between items in a series containing internal punctuation

- Use semicolons in place of commas when there are already other commas in the series that would cause difficulty in distinguishing which commas were meant for what purpose.

Example:

- Ben, my brother; Amy, his girlfriend; Beki, my best friend; and Bert, her boyfriend, are all coming to the party on Saturday.

Avoid these common misuses of the semicolon:

1. Placing a semicolon between a subordinate clause and the rest of the sentence.

Example: Unless you eat your peas; you cannot have desert. **Incorrect!**

2. Using a semicolon to introduce a list.

Example: I am going to buy a few things at Target; toothpaste, hairspray, and shampoo. **Incorrect!**

3. Inserting a semicolon between independent clauses joined by *and, but, or, nor, for, so, or yet*.

Example: I want to go to the mall; but Mom wants to go to the park. **Incorrect!**