

## Semicolons, Colons, and Other Punctuation

### THE SEMICOLON

Like commas, semicolons separate different elements within a sentence. The semicolon, however, signals a more emphatic break than a comma does.

#### Semicolons Used with Commas

When there are several commas within parts of a compound sentence, use a semicolon to separate the parts. Use a semicolon between main clauses joined by a conjunction if the clause before the conjunction contains commas.

Jim had done research, taken notes, and made an outline; but he didn't feel ready to begin writing.

We put out sandwiches, cider, raw vegetables, and potato salad; and still we wondered if there would be enough to eat.

When there are commas within parts of a series, use a semicolon to separate the parts.

Members of our class come from as far away as Leeds, England; New Delhi, India; and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Maria was in charge of the scenery; Roy, the costumes; and Felipe, the directing of the play. Eric called the dancers together; reviewed the opening number; solos, and finale; and told them to be ready by seven sharp.

#### Semicolons Between Main Clauses

Use a semicolon to join the parts of a compound sentence if no coordinating conjunction is used.

A stronger relationship between the clauses is shown by a semicolon rather than by a conjunction such as *and* or *but*. Bonita is good at set shots, but I am not. Bonita is good at set shots; I am not. The cyclone struck with savage fury, and it demolished most of the little coastal town. The cyclone struck with savage fury; it demolished most of the little coastal town.



Remember that a semicolon may be used only if clauses are closely related. Do not use a semicolon to join unrelated clauses.

*Incorrect* José is a fine athlete; the school fields many teams. José is a fine athlete; he has earned letters in golf, swimming, and baseball.

#### Semicolons and Conjunctive Adverbs

Use a semicolon before a conjunctive adverb or a parenthetical expression that joins the clauses of a compound sentence.

Our treasury was nearly empty; accordingly, we began considering various fund-raising projects. Many of their talents complemented each other; for example, he played the piano and she sang.

Note that the conjunctive adverb or transitional phrase is followed by a comma in the examples above.

#### Practice Your Skills

##### A. CONCEPT CHECK

**Semicolons** Semicolons have been omitted from the following literary passages. Rewrite the passages, inserting semicolons where they are needed.

1. Learning is not child's play we cannot learn without pain.

2. Wear your learning like your watch, in a private pocket do not pull it out and strike it, merely to show that you have one.

3. She had a painful sense of having missed something, or lost something she felt that somehow the years had cheated her.

4. Reading furnishes our mind only with materials of knowledge it is thinking that makes what we read ours.

5. Nine times out of ten, in the arts as in life, there is actually no truth to be discovered there is only error to be exposed.

6. When you reread a classic, you do not see more in the book than you did before you see more in you than there was before.

7. Books swept me away, one after the other, this way and that I made endless vows according to their lights, for I believed them.

*Annie Dillard*

*Clifton Fadiman*

*H. L. Mencken*

*John Locke*

*Willia Gather*

*Lord Chesterfield*

*Aristotle*

*Writing TIP*

Many words can be used either as conjunctive adverbs or as interrupters. If the words are used as interrupters, use commas to set them off from the rest of the sentence.

*Writing Theme*  
Books, Learning, and Words