

I have grown fond of semicolons in recent years. . . . It is almost always a greater pleasure to come across a semicolon than a period. The period tells you...that is that; if you didn't get all the meaning you wanted or expected,...you got all the writer intended to parcel out and now you have to move along. But with a semicolon there you get a pleasant little feeling of expectancy; there is more to come; read on; it will get clearer.
– Lewis Thomas

SEMICOLONS

The semicolon enjoys a unique role among punctuation marks; it is the union of the comma and the period. The semicolon alerts the reader that something else of related importance follows. Semicolons also join ideas that build upon or clarify one another.

Use the semicolon...

- **Between two closely related, full sentences (each with their own subjects and verbs) that are NOT joined by one of the FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).**

Example: Injustice is relatively easy to bear; what stings is justice. — H. L. Mencken

Error: Truth requires judgment; **or at least opinion.** (the phrase in bold is an incomplete sentence; it should be set off with a comma)

Error: Rhetoric may lead to action; **but** talking rarely replaces doing. (two complete sentences separated by one of the FANBOYS should be punctuated with a comma)

- **Between two full sentences linked with a transition that is followed by a comma (e.g., however, for example, furthermore, on the other hand).**

Example: She had planned to dye her hair purple by Monday morning; unfortunately, the store was out of grape Jell-O on Sunday afternoon.

Error: Ice cream is the perfect treat during Carolina summers, **however,** it is rarely the top choice at a Hurricanes hockey game. (the two commas before and after "however" compete with one another; since the first comma is more important—it separates two complete sentences—it needs to stand out more by becoming a semicolon)

- **Between items in a series that are long, complicated and/or contain commas.**

Example: Science fiction classics include *Star Trek* with Mr. Spock and his large, pointed ears; *Battlestar Galactica* with its memorable Cylon Warriors; and *Star Wars* with the contrasting good and evil of Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader, respectively.

Error: Box office smashes that feature numbers in their titles include *The Sixth Sense*, starring Bruce Willis and Haley Joel Osment, *Seven*, starring Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman, and *The Dirty Dozen*, a 1967 adventure film with Ernest Borgnine. (each item in this three-part series contains a comma, which means that the commas separating the three items are lost among many. To make the separating commas stand out, they need to become semicolons)

Do not use the semicolon...

- **Before or after an incomplete sentence.** Usually a comma will do.

Error: Upon my return home; I discovered the demise of my long-cherished Dairy Queen.

Error: Dating is overrated; not to mention awkward, embarrassing, and probably necessary.

- **To introduce a list.** That's what the colon (:) is for.

Error: I went to the store for some essentials; Cheetos, Sprite, skim milk and Grape Nuts.