

Semicolons

Nothing can revolutionize your writing more than the proper use of semicolons.

Nothing.

However, like anything good, their overuse can minimize their effect, so what we're striving for with semicolons is a

knowledge of how to use them in just the right places. Properly used, semicolons can make a reader sit up and really pay attention to what you're saying. That's what we're going after.

The Three Functions of a Semicolon

Function 1: Use a semicolon as a way to connect two sentences.

This mark of punctuation falls somewhere between the definitive finality of a period, the slight pause of a comma, and the gentle lull of the conjunction. That's the source of its power. When you are writing and come to the end of a thought, you basically have four choices:

1. Stop the sentence and put some end mark to indicate you're done. Then do the same for the next sentence.
2. Connect the two sentences by using a comma and one of the following coor-

Sample Paragraph—*Version #1*

It was time for my annual spring cleaning. The windows were first on my "to do" list. Hearing my mother's voice in the back of my head, I got out a bucket for the vinegar-and-water solution she always insisted was the best to use, and a few newspapers instead of the roll of paper towels I usually used. *Suddenly it struck me. I was becoming my mother.*

Version #2

After a while it struck me that I was becoming my mother.

Version #3

Suddenly it struck me; I was becoming my mother.

Can you feel a difference? Look at the underlined sentences. All of the versions of that paragraph are correct. There's nothing wrong with any of them. But there's a subtle difference between them. In the first version, the last two sentences have a definite break between the thoughts. In version #2, the connection is more "quiet" and

ordinating conjunctions: *and, but, or, nor, for, or yet.*

3. Connect the two sentences with a subordinating conjunction like *after, although, because, since, when,* etc. (See page 27 for a complete list of subordinating conjunctions.)
4. Use a semicolon as a connection that's not quite as strong as a period, but more forceful than a conjunction.

Let's look at what I'm talking about:

gently joins the thoughts together. In version #3, the break is less severe than #1, but not as calm as #2, and as a result the reader sort of stops after the first thought and really pays attention to what's on the other side of the semicolon. You as the author get to decide the "feel" you want. It's kind of like being a composer and deciding



what kind of a finale you want. Do you want cymbals clashing and trumpets blaring to signify you're at the end? Do you want to go out with the soft touch of a lullaby? Or do you want your ending to blare those trumpets, play a rest note, and then crash the cymbals? That's what the semicolon does.

It seems as if you've ended your thought, but then you give your reader the double whammy and really pack a punch with that last thought.

See if you think that's what's happening in the following examples:

Version #1: Strangely, we loved that old tenement apartment. It was the place our life together began.

Version #2: Strangely, we loved that old tenement apartment because it was the place our life together began.

Version #3: Strangely, we loved that old tenement apartment; it was the place our life together began.

Even more examples:

Version #1: He no longer stood straight. Age had bent him.

Version #2: He no longer stood straight since age had bent him.

Version #3: He no longer stood straight; age had bent him.

When using the semicolon for this function be sure you really have something powerful to say in the last part of your

sentence. If you don't, the semicolon's effect is diminished.

Function 2: Use a semicolon before one of the following words when they are being used as transition words linking two independent clauses together: *for example, for instance, moreover, nevertheless, furthermore, otherwise, therefore, however, consequently, besides.*

Examples	The movie we saw last week was great for the most part; however, it moved a little slowly in the middle.
	I arrived 10 minutes late for the train; consequently, I had to wait over an hour for the next one to arrive.
	Sonya is planning on making the Olympic skating team; therefore, she practices night and day.

Function 3: Use a semicolon between items being listed in a series if the items themselves already contain commas.

Example	The contestants for the pie-eating world championships came from Geneva, Switzerland; Hoboken, New Jersey; Sydney, Australia; and Montreal, Canada.
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Exercise 4.8

Practice your new-found appreciation of the semicolon in the following sentences. Place a semicolon wherever you think one should go. A few sentences also need commas added. Rewrite the sentences using one of the examples on page 84 as a model.

1. A kiss is not a contract an engagement is not a marriage.

2. Panic filled the air when the alarm sounded the men didn't know if they'd ever see their loved ones again.

3. The committee included Louisa Barkes president of Concerned Citizens Felix Walk chairman of the Board of Trustees for Pervalley College Marguerite Johanssen CEO of Comtel Computers and Rob Wood president of Mutual Airlines.

4. Tension was high at yesterday's meeting however after the lunch break members of the committee seemed able to get down to the business at hand.

5. Holiday traffic has always produced an increase in accidents for instance during the recent Thanksgiving holiday 632 people were injured on Florida's highways.

These next few marks of punctuation are not as complicated as the ones in the first part of this chapter, so we'll just do a

quick look at some of these less-used but still important punctuation tools.



Name: _____



Punctuation: Using the Semicolon



Circle the area where there should be a colon and insert the colon in the correct spot.

Sometimes either the comma or semicolon could be used.

1. I love soda however soda gives me heartburn.
2. I have relatives in Chicago Illinois Toronto Ontario Paris
France and Dallas Texas.
3. Pasta is the best meal ever it sure is my favorite!
4. I take vitamins I take them daily.
5. My sister is 13 I am 11.
6. We have bunk beds I sleep on the top bunk.
7. I ate all of my supper therefore I should get a treat!
8. My friend doesn't approve of me drinking soda but, I don't
care what my friend thinks about what I drink.
9. I read the book in one evening it wasn't very good.
10. I did not finish reading the book instead, I watched TV.

Name: _____



Punctuation: Using the Semicolon

Circle the area where there should be a colon and insert the colon in the correct spot.

Sometimes either the comma or semicolon could be used.

1. Kelly wants to play outside Kim wants to play inside.
2. You didn't try your very best your marks went down this term.
3. My hair is very wet I just washed it.
4. If you go to the store I'll need golden apples unsalted butter whole wheat bread tomato soup and potatoes.
5. All students must: arrive on time complete all tasks follow the rules and be their best.
6. My mother planted roses the roses were all red.
7. You should talk to Jade other wise she'll think you're mad at her.
8. I love going to the gym I also like riding my bike.
9. My mom didn't feel well however she still came to see my game.
10. Jill was the only girl the team needed her.

Name: _____

Independent Clauses and the Semicolon

Two independent clauses can be joined by a semicolon if they are related.

Match the sentences and connect them by a semicolon.

Remember: the second clause does not begin with a capital letter.



I don't enjoy rap music.

She only plays classical music.

The race was getting very exciting.

I forgot to bring my money.

My friend loves playing her violin.

She sings at our church.

The plane taxied down the runway.

We were ready for take off.

Jen is an excellent singer.

I much prefer hip hop.

I went to the store.

The runners are tied.

Colons

There are really only two instances in which a colon is necessary:

1. Use a colon when you're beginning a list of items, especially if you use the words *as follows* or *the following*.

Examples	Melanie packed the following for her weekend trip to Grandma's: three stuffed teddy bears, eight pairs of socks, 14 trousers with matching shirts, a jump rope, six books to read, and a box of Devil Dogs. Dad posted the following note: no eating in the car, no talking in the car, and no sleeping in the car.
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2. Use a colon after the salutation of a business letter. (Use a comma after the salutation of a friendly letter.)

Examples	Dear Sir: To whom it may concern: Dear Polly,
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NOTE: Remember to use a colon when writing times, i.e., 1:00 p.m., 3:30 a.m., etc.

Dash

Somewhat like the exclamation point and the semicolon, the dash should not be overused. It will lose its effectiveness if you always pepper your pages with it. Its basic job is to *indicate an abrupt break in thought*. When typing, use the hyphen key twice (--) to indicate a dash.

Examples	There was only one way to describe Billy—way cool! I wish I had told you this before—but then you probably weren't ready to hear it—I'm planning to join the circus.
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Name: _____



Punctuation: Using the Colon

Circle the area where there should be a colon and insert the colon in the correct spot.

1. My students have two favorite games hopscotch and soccer.
2. I like the following subjects math, gym, science and health.
3. Please bring the following fruits apples, plums, oranges and bananas.
4. I need a friend who demonstrates the following traits kindness, devoted, friendly and honest.
5. Jake got what he deserved a detention for being late.
6. PS Don't forget to bring your towel.
7. Here are the classroom rules
 1. Raise your hand before speaking.
 2. Respect each other.
 3. Listen to one another.
8. Dear Mr. Jones
9. The ratio of boys to girls in our class is 13
10. Recess begins at 1045

Hyphen

1. Use a hyphen (-) to divide a word at the end of a line.

Example	When Gloria was depressed, and unfortunately that was pretty often, she'd paint her fingernails and drink lemon water all day.
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2. Use a hyphen with some compound words used as adjectives when they *precede* the word they modify, and in some words used with their prefixes. Be careful with this, as many words that once needed a hyphen no longer do. This seems to be one of the places where the fluidity of language is most apparent.

Examples	door-to-door salesman	BUT	a salesman who sells from door to door
	An after-school meeting	BUT	a meeting after school
	A well-dressed man	BUT	a man who is well dressed
	Ex-president		governor-elect all-star
	e-mail	BUT	World Wide Web (Watch out for computer-related terms; they may be changing and will lose their hyphens as they become more accepted into the spoken language.)
	African-American man	BUT	a man who is African American

3. Use a hyphen when you're writing the compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine and with fractions used as adjectives.

Examples	<i>Forty-two</i> flamingos floated far away.
	Their <i>seventy-fifth</i> wedding anniversary is almost here.
	A <i>two-thirds</i> majority is needed to overturn a presidential veto.
	BUT <i>Two thirds</i> of Congress is needed to overturn a presidential veto.



Parentheses

Use parentheses () when you want to set off information that is not vital to a sentence. Unlike the dash, parentheses tend to *minimize* whatever it is they are setting off. Also use parentheses to enclose figures or dates in a sentence.

Examples	Doing some type of exercise daily (swimming, running, step-aerobics) has exhausted her. We will celebrate Peter's birthday (September 29) at the roller rink.
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Capitalization

1. Capitalize the first word of every sentence.

Example	When the cruise ship takes off, Avi will be on it.
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2. Capitalize the first word in a direct quote. (See page 80 for more on this.)

Examples	"Don't you dare leave without me," Avi told the captain. Then the captain said, "Do you have your papers in order?"
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3. The pronoun "I" is always capitalized no matter where it appears in the sentence.

Examples	Can I go on that boat, too? No matter what, I plan to get a room with a porthole.
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4. Capitalize the days of the week, months of the year, and holidays.

Example	The ship is leaving on Thursday, November 28, which happens to be Thanksgiving this year.
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5. Capitalize proper nouns and proper adjectives.

Don't capitalize the names of school subjects—except for the languages, since they are proper nouns. If a course, however, has its name followed by a number or its full name, then it is considered a proper noun.

Examples	I heard Dustin Hoffman is planning a cruise vacation, too. This Norwegian cruise ship is one of the most luxurious boats ever built. I'm planning on learning Italian while on board, unless of course they're offering History of the Renaissance. I love history.
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6. Capitalize the names of important historical events and periods, special events, and the formal titles of documents.

Examples	The ship was built during the Vietnam War, but it gets yearly upgrades. We'll be on board just after the World Series. I hear this is the ship where President Nixon penned his Address to the American People when he formally resigned from office.
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7. Capitalize the most important words in books, magazines, movies, plays, songs, paintings, sculptures, and poems. Remember to underline or italicize those titles.

Examples	I'm planning on taking along <i>Dr. Spock's Guide to Well Baby Care</i> , along with several back issues of <i>Parents</i> magazine. I've heard while we're on board there's going to be a performance of excerpts from the play <i>Cats</i> .
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Something to Think About: Using several marks of punctuation you've just learned about, punctuate the following: (It will make sense, I promise!)

that that is is that that is not is not is that it it is

Name: _____



Colon or Semicolon?



Decide whether a colon or a semicolon is needed and insert either in the correct area of the sentence.



1. I have a dental appointment on Wednesday at 2:00 PM.
2. Bob ate the pizza Jane ate the burgers.
3. I went to the cottage my sister went to the zoo.
4. The restaurant served the type of food we all like pasta.
5. The speech was stellar creative, informative and well presented.
6. I went to the library it was closed.
7. Tomorrow will start out sunny however, rain is expected by the afternoon.
8. I am sick I need some Tylenol.
9. To Whom It May Concern
10. Jay made a dental appointment he lost a tooth when the puck hit him.
11. I need the following groceries milk, bread, juice, and butter.
12. I have one goal to win the race.

Name: _____



Punctuation: Using the Semicolon



Circle the area where there should be a colon and insert the colon in the correct spot.

Sometimes either the comma or semicolon could be used.

1. Eating healthy helps you lose weight staying fit keeps you healthy.
2. I'll need to do the following today: take out the trash pay my hydro bill water my plants and shop for groceries.
3. My dog hates dog food he loves eating my dinner.
4. I hate doing math homework I love doing art homework.
5. This summer I'm going hiking taking a cruise and relaxing!
6. I don't like orange soda I much prefer a cola.
7. I got an A on my English assignment I really studied hard.
8. I don't like going to the gym in fact I cancelled my membership.
9. I had to use my brother's golf clubs I forgot my clubs at home.
10. Neither of us can speak French we had to get a translator.