

TIP Sheet

THE SEMICOLON

The semicolon is used to separate independent clauses in specific situations. It also separates a series of items which contain internal punctuation.

1. Use a semicolon between independent clauses when the clauses are closely related in meaning and when there is no coordinating conjunction between them.

- Often two independent clauses which are closely related in meaning can be connected by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, not, for, so, yet*). However, if the relationship between the clauses is clear without the conjunction, the writer can choose to omit the coordinating conjunction and use a semicolon instead. The semicolon tends to emphasize the close connection between the two thoughts.
When you come to London, Kristen, you will stay with me; I wouldn't have it otherwise.

Be careful and drive defensively; you'll be glad you did.

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

- Transitional expressions include conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases.

Conjunctive adverbs

<i>accordingly</i>	<i>finally</i>	<i>likewise</i>	<i>similarly</i>
<i>also</i>	<i>furthermore</i>	<i>meanwhile</i>	<i>specifically</i>
<i>anyway</i>	<i>hence</i>	<i>moreover</i>	<i>still</i>
<i>besides</i>	<i>however</i>	<i>nevertheless</i>	<i>subsequently</i>
<i>certainly</i>	<i>incidentally</i>	<i>next</i>	<i>the</i>
<i>consequently</i>	<i>indeed</i>	<i>nonetheless</i>	<i>therefore</i>
<i>conversely</i>	<i>instead</i>	<i>otherwise</i>	<i>thus</i>

Transitional phrases

<i>after all</i>	<i>even so</i>	<i>in fact</i>
<i>as a matter of fact</i>	<i>for example</i>	<i>in other words</i>
<i>as a result</i>	<i>for instance</i>	<i>in the first place</i>
<i>at any rate</i>	<i>in addition</i>	<i>on the contrary</i>
<i>at the same time</i>	<i>in conclusion</i>	<i>on the other hand</i>

- When a transitional expression appears between independent clauses, the transition is preceded by a semicolon and usually followed by a comma.

The cook's specialty is broiled salmon; however, tonight it's not available.

That's a difficult question; in other words, I'm not going to answer it.

- When the transitional expression appears in the middle or at the end of the second independent clause, the semicolon goes between the clauses.

The man pleaded innocent; his face, however, looked as guilty as sin.

- Transitional expressions should not be confused with the coordinating conjunctions *and, but, or, not, for, so, and yet*. When coordinating conjunctions connect independent clauses, they are preceded by a comma.
- **Exception:** Sometimes when independent clauses contain internal punctuation which might cause confusion, a semicolon may be used in addition to a coordinating conjunction.

The hike will be difficult to complete, dangerous to attempt, frightening for most of us, and long; and in spite of her reassurances, I don't even think we should go.

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

- When the division of items becomes confusing due to multiple punctuation marks, use semicolons to distinguish between major groupings of ideas.

We visited Washington, D.C., in the fall; Downer's Grove, Illinois, in the spring; and Cooperstown, New York, in the middle of a very hot summer.

The population of my hometown in 1762 was 4,123; in 1790, 7,921; and in 1998, 42,380.