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The Semicolon

Recognize a *semicolon* when you see one.

The semicolon [;] is a powerful mark of punctuation with three uses.

The first appropriate use of the semicolon is to connect two related sentences. The pattern looks like this:

COMPLETE SENTENCE + ; +

COMPLETE SENTENCE .

Here is an example:

Grandma still rides her Harley motorcycle; her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

A semicolon can also team up with a transition—often a **conjunctive adverb**—to connect two sentences close in meaning. The pattern looks like this:

COMPLETE SENTENCE + ; +

transition + , + **COMPLETE**

SENTENCE .

Check out this example:

My father does not approve of his mother cruising around town on a Harley motorcycle;
however, Grandma has never cared what anyone thinks.

Finally, use the semicolon to avoid confusion when you have complicated lists of items. The pattern looks like this:

ITEM + , + more information + ; +

ITEM + , + more information + ; +

and + **ITEM** + , + more information

Read the following example:

On a Harley motorcycle, my grandmother and her poodle have traveled to Anchorage, *Alaska*; San Francisco, *California*; and Tijuana, *Mexico*.

Keep these three things in mind when you use a semicolon:

- The two main clauses that the semicolon joins should be closely related in meaning.
- Don't capitalize the word that follows the semicolon unless that word is a **proper**

noun, one that is *a/ways* capitalized.

- Limit your use of semicolons; you should not scatter them wantonly throughout your writing. Semicolons are like glasses of champagne; save them for special occasions.



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