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# Outlines

3.6 Using Semicolons

Exercise 3.9

Exercise 3.10

3.7 Using Colons





## 3.6 Using Semicolons

- ❖ The basic function of the semicolon (;) is simple.
- ❖ In other words, a semicolon is used between independent clauses that are not linked by a conjunction like *and*.
- ❖ There are **three essential rules** for when to use a semicolon.

❖



## Rule 1: Use a Semicolon to Connect Related Independent Clauses

A semicolon can be used to join related independent clauses if the clauses share a close and logical connection.

### *What does this mean?*

An independent clause is a complete sentence, meaning it could stand by itself. That said, **if your complete sentence is closely related to ideas expressed in *another* complete sentence, you can join them with a semicolon.**

Here's an example:

- ❖ We ran out of food at home; my boyfriend went to the store
- ❖ The ideas expressed in each independent clause are related—**they both have to do with eating.** So, they can be joined together by a semicolon.



## **Rule 2: Use a Semicolon to Divide Items in a List**

While commas are most commonly used to separate items in a list, **you can use semicolons in their stead if the items are long or contain internal punctuation.**

Here's an example of how this works:

Ex: On my trip around the world, I went to Cape Town, South Africa; Cairns, Australia; Wellington, New Zealand; and Tokyo, Japan.

In this sentence, the items in the list contain internal punctuation (commas). It would be confusing to use more commas to separate the items here, so instead you can (and should) use a semicolon.



### Rule 3: Use a Semicolon With Conjunctive Adverbs

A conjunctive adverb is a word that joins two independent clauses into one sentence. Common conjunctive adverbs include the following:

- Moreover
- Nevertheless
- Otherwise
- Therefore
- Finally
- Likewise
- Consequently

**You should generally use a semicolon before a conjunctive adverb.**

Ex: I had planned to go out with my friends; however, I was very tired.

The conjunctive adverb in this sentence is "however," which brings together the two clauses ("I had planned to go out with my friends" and "I was very tired"). **You'd put a semicolon *right before the conjunctive adverb* that joins the two clauses.**



# How to Use a Semicolon: 4 Essential Tips

## #1: Don't Replace a Comma or Period With a Semicolon (or Vice Versa)

**Semicolons are *not* commas**—they have their own rules that govern proper usage. So don't just replace a comma with a semicolon (or vice versa). **If you do this, you're most likely wrong and will end up with a comma splice.**

**Incorrect:** It is nearly dark, we should go home.

**Correct:** It is nearly dark; we should go home.

As both of the clauses in this example are independent, a semicolon should separate them. If you use a comma here, you'd be creating a comma splice, which is grammatically incorrect.



# How to Use a Semicolon: 4 Essential Tips

## #2: Delete the Conjunction

**A semicolon often acts like a conjunction in that both join independent clauses.** Because a semicolon does the same job as a conjunction, using them together would be redundant (unless it's a list).

**Incorrect:** I went to the mall to go shopping; and my mom came with me.

**Correct:** I went to the mall to go shopping; my mom came with me

## #3: Skip the Capital Letters

**Most of the time, you don't need to use a capital letter after a semicolon.**

Let's look at the above example again:

**Incorrect:** I went to the mall to go shopping; My mom came with me.

**Correct:** I went to the mall to go shopping; my mom came with me



# How to Use a Semicolon: 4 Essential Tips

## #4: Except in a List, Your Semicolon Should Always Be Replaceable by a Period

Except when you're listing items in a series, your semicolon should *always* be replaceable by a period (or vice versa).

Once again, let's take a look at our previous example:

**Correct:** I went to the mall to go shopping; my mom came with me.

**Also Correct:** I went to the mall to go shopping. My mom came with me.

Both examples are grammatically correct. Because semicolons can be used to connect related independent clauses, they are often interchangeable with periods.

That said, **semicolons are *not* interchangeable with periods when used in a list**



# Exercises

**Sentence A:** The road trip included stops in Lake Placid; New York, Boston; Massachusetts, and Providence; Rhode Island.

**Sentence B:** The road trip included stops in Lake Placid, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; and Providence, Rhode Island.

**Sentence C:** My mother went back to college; and, she studied psychology.

**Sentence D:** My mother went back to college; she studied psychology.

Sentence E: Because cows smell; they offend me.

**Sentence F:** *Because cows smell, they offend me.*