

Using the Semicolon

1. Two sentences can be connected by a semicolon when their meaning is connected.
 - A period is used to indicate the end of one grammatical sentence. However, when two sentences are linked by the same idea, they can be combined with a semicolon:
 - Why farmers in China began to cultivate the soybean is unclear; plants that lie on the ground are hard to cultivate, and the seeds of the wild soybean are tiny, hard and, unless properly prepared, indigestible.
 - Often the second “sentence” adds detail, provides an explanation, or points out a contrast. In this case, the second “sentence,” or clause, in the above example provides an explanation.
2. Use a semicolon between closely related independent clauses not joined by a coordinating conjunction.
 - When related independent clauses appear in one sentence, they are ordinarily connected with a comma and a coordinating junction (and, but, for, nor, so, yet) and the conjunction expresses the relation between the clauses. If the relationship is clear without the conjunction, the sentences may be connected with a semicolon instead:
 - “Injustice is relatively easy to bear, but what stings is justice” is more effectively written as “Injustice is relatively easy to bear; what stings is justice” (Hacker 207).
 - You must use a semicolon if you omit a coordinating junction (and, but, for, nor, so, yet).
 - Incorrect - Comma Splice:
 - ✗ Most Canadian hospitals offer only Western methods of treatment, hospitals in China provide both Western and traditional Chinese medicine.
 - Correct using a comma:
 - ✓ Most Canadian hospitals offer only Western methods of treatment, but hospitals in China provide both Western and traditional Chinese medicine.
 - Correct using a semicolon:
 - ✓ Most Canadian hospitals offer only Western methods of treatment; hospitals in China provide both Western and traditional Chinese medicine (Hacker 208).

3. Use a semicolon between independent clauses linked with a transitional expression (conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases).
 - When a transitional expression appears between independent clauses, it is preceded by a semicolon and often followed by a comma:
 - I learned all the rules and regulations; however, I never really learned to control the ball (Hacker 208).
4. Use a semicolon in place of a comma to separate major items in a complex list (that is, where at least one of the items contains a comma):
 - Classic science fiction sagas are Star Trek, with Mr. Spock and his large pointed ears; Battlestar Galactica, with its Cylon Raiders; and Star Wars, with Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, and Darth Vader (Hacker 209).

References and Sources Consulted

- Hacker, D. (1996). *A Canadian writer's reference* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Nelson Canada.
- Raimes, A. (1998). *How English works: A grammar handbook with readings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swan, M. (2003). *Practical English usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.