

Grammar Handout 6: The Semicolon (Pt.I)

Name: _____

This is a semicolon → ;

RULE: The main use of the semicolon is to join 2 separate but related sentences.

Example: My dog is very brave ; last night he barked at five raccoons!

Here is how the rule works:

To use a semicolon in this way, you need two complete sentences that could stand alone by themselves (i.e., two independent clauses). By *joining* these two sentences with a semicolon, you can make the second sentence into a logical continuation of the first.

Example of two separate sentences divided by a period:

Traffic is really bad today. I almost crashed my bicycle on my way to work.

Note: As separate sentences, these ideas might come across as unrelated. However, when you link them with a semicolon, the bad traffic becomes the reason you almost crashed your bicycle.

Example of two separate but *related* sentences joined by a semicolon:

Traffic is really bad today ; I almost crashed my bicycle on my way to work.

Tip 1: It is not correct to join 2 totally unrelated independent clauses with a semicolon.

Which sentence below uses a semicolon correctly, and which uses a semicolon incorrectly?

- A. Semicolons were once a great mystery to me ; I would really like a sandwich.
- B. Semicolons were once a great mystery to me ; I had no idea where to put them.

Tip 2: Remember the FANBOYS—the coordinating conjunctions *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*?

The semicolon gives you an alternative to this rule for commas (which we already went over): you can join 2 independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (i.e., Comma + FANBOYS).

Ex.: I had trouble reading your article about jellyfish , **for** I was distracted by the stunning pictures.

Here is the tip: Instead of using a comma + FANBOYS to join 2 independent clauses, you can use just a semicolon to do the job.

Ex. I had trouble reading your article about jellyfish ; I was distracted by the stunning pictures.

Tip 3: Use a semicolon before a conjunctive adverb that joins two independent clauses.

Conjunctive adverbs commonly used are *however, therefore, consequently, nevertheless, hence, moreover, besides, and furthermore*.

Each of these words shows a relationship between ideas, such as...

- contrast – *however* and *nevertheless*
- cause-and-effect – *therefore, consequently, and hence*
- elaboration of a point with additional evidence or reasoning – *moreover, besides, and furthermore*

Ex: Mr. Robel teaches English during the week ; **however**, he lives the thug life on weekends.

Note: When you use a semicolon in this way, you will always use a comma after the conjunctive adverb.

Exercise: Using Semicolons Correctly

The following sentences are punctuated *incorrectly*. Insert semicolons wherever necessary.

1. Jared is King of Carmel High School ; Mr. Robel is Emperor of Room 30.
2. Call me tomorrow ; you can give me an answer then.
3. We have paid our dues ; therefore, we expect all the privileges listed in the contract.
4. Bring any two items ; however, sleeping bags and tents are in short supply.
5. Richard likes cake ; Susan likes salad.
6. Jim is a good omelet-maker ; he really knows how to whip up a surprise.
7. I didn't see the step before I fell ; I've now got a bandage on my head.
8. Mom wants the chores completed ; moreover, she wants them done properly.
9. I will be there as soon as I finish working ; that is a promise I will definitely keep.
10. She didn't see the other car coming ; now her car has a huge dent.
11. There is serious evidence of climate change ; however, some people refuse to believe it.
12. We had too many fumbles ; consequently, we lost the game.
13. I know you don't like broccoli ; nevertheless, it is very good for you.