

SEMICOLON USAGE

1. A semicolon can be used by itself to connect closely related sentences (independent clauses).

I can't eat strawberries; they give me a rash.
The nurse will see you now; the doctor will see you later.

2. A semicolon can be used with an adverbial conjunction or transitional phrase to connect closely related sentences:

He studied hard; therefore, he earns excellent grades.
He studied hard; as a result, he earns excellent grades.

Other common adverbial conjunctions or transitions used with the semicolon include the following: hence, consequently, thus, then, indeed, moreover, furthermore, accordingly, however, nevertheless, also, for example, for instance, on the other hand, at the same time, to illustrate, in other words, without a doubt, as a matter of fact, in particular, etc.

Please note: Instead of using a semicolon in the example for # 1 and # 2 above, the writer could have used a period and a capital letter:

I can't eat strawberries. They give me a rash.
He studies hard. Therefore, he earns excellent grades.

The reason to learn how to use semicolons is so that your sentence variety will improve; you will have more options, more ways to vary your sentences.

Always be alert for conjunctive adverbs or transitional phrases which are used as interrupters instead of as sentence connectors. In that case, they would simply require commas. In fact, using these words in different ways will also improve your sentence variety.

No one I know, however, is going to the party.
I am, without a doubt, going to change my grip the next time I play golf.

She works too hard; one of these days, therefore, I think she's going to collapse.
I am angry about the changes; I will, nevertheless, try to follow the new rules.

Finally, however, beware of the word "however." It is sometimes used as a regular adverb and, therefore, does not require any commas:

Arrange your vacation however you like.

3. Another use (less common than the previous two) for the semicolon is to connect sentences with coordinate conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet) if one or more of the sentences contain a comma or commas:

Jane wanted to be a surgeon; but she learned from her doctor, who had been in practice for many years, that to reach her goal would require great ambition.

4. Semicolons may be used to separate items in a series when they are unusually long or contain internal punctuation. Like #3 above, using the semicolon will make it easier for the reader to see the separation of ideas:

I am currently taking Spanish, which I enjoy; math, which I find difficult; and psychology, which is my favorite subject.

The following people were invited: Tim, my cousin; Erik, a good friend; Sandy, a neighbor; and Belinda, my sister-in-law.

Note: Look for semicolons in your reading and for ways to use them in your writing to improve your sentence variety.

Directions: Add only semicolons or commas to the following sentences:

1. Joey is a good friend of mine however sometimes I don't trust him.
2. Joey is a good friend of mine however I don't trust him.
3. I have several favorite athletes: in basketball Bill Russell in baseball Hank Aaron in tennis Martina Navratilova and in boxing Muhammad Ali.
4. I am really disgusted with my essay therefore I am going to start over with a new topic.
5. I understand the problem nevertheless I can't seem to solve it however hard I try.
6. The crowd was too rowdy the band as a result quit playing and walked off the stage.
7. The crowd was too rowdy as a result the band quit playing and walked off the stage.
8. I will talk to the class first the tutor will then give a short presentation.
9. I will talk to the class first then the tutor will give a short presentation.
10. As a matter of fact I am too tired to think right now but if I take a short nap I expect to be able to finish my homework before midnight.