

## The Semicolon

A semicolon is half-comma and half-period. Unlike the comma, it is strong enough to join independent clauses together and control their flow with a stop, but that stop indicates a closely linked idea that follows. The semicolon also separates items in serial lists. Do not capitalize the word following the semicolon.

1. Use a semicolon between two related independent clauses of equal emphasis.

Most science fiction novels have a quest structure; the final challenges in <i>Brave New World</i> exemplify this story arc.
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Summer road construction in Montreal has hindered travel around town; streets have become strewn with bulldozers, trucks, and cones.
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2. Use a semicolon to correct a comma splice. This is a type of run-on sentence created when two independent clauses are joined using a comma. The comma splice may not seem problematic in a compound sentence that only includes two short independent clauses (though it is still an error), but with longer sentences, the flow, connection, and logic among ideas can be disrupted without a stronger stop. See the BU Writing Centre *The Comma Splice Repair Guide* for further information.

<b>Incorrect</b>	The symphony was brilliant, the audience gave the orchestra a standing ovation.
<b>Correct</b>	The symphony was brilliant; the audience gave the orchestra a standing ovation.

In this example, the comma splice could have been corrected with a period, but the semicolon suggests a close relationship (in this case a causal relationship) between the ideas of the two clauses. Here, the reader understands that the audience applauded the orchestra *because* the symphony was brilliant.<sup>1</sup>

3. Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses when the second clause begins with a conjunctive adverb (however, therefore, moreover, furthermore, thus, meanwhile, nonetheless, otherwise, in fact, for example, in addition, in other words, even so, etc.). The semicolon precedes the conjunctive adverb, and a comma comes after it.

Learning a second language is challenging; however, the rewards are worth the struggle.
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Children should experience boredom; as a result, their creativity will flourish.

NOTE: Be sure that you do not write sentence fragments after semicolons. This problem is especially common with the transitional phrase *for example*. This error can be corrected by including a subject and verb before “heated seats and adjustable cup holders”:

<b>Incorrect</b>	Newer vehicles come with amenities; for example, heated seats and adjustable cup holders.
<b>Correct</b>	Newer vehicles come with amenities; for example, <u>they have</u> heated seats and adjustable cup holders.

4. Use a semicolon to separate words in a series if there are already commas. Simply using more commas to separate those complex items creates confusion.

<b>Incorrect</b>	Performances during the ceremony include Sunny Chang, piano, Ivan Kravchenko, violin, and Sean McLachlan, bagpipes.
<b>Correct</b>	Performances during the ceremony include Sunny Chang, piano; Ivan Kravchenko, violin; and Sean McLachlan, bagpipes.
<b>Incorrect</b>	Recent sites of the Olympic Games include Tokyo, Japan, Beijing, China, PyeongChang, South Korea, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
<b>Correct</b>	Recent sites of the Olympic Games include Tokyo, Japan; Beijing, China; PyeongChang, South Korea; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

5. In-text citations with multiple sources use semicolons to divide them.

Numerous studies have established connections between quality of sleep and academic performance (Alqudah et al., 2019; Gruber et al., 2016; Cusick et al., 2018).

School curricula should reflect a society’s values (Burke 3; Dewey 21).

Material paraphrased from:

<sup>1</sup>[http://writing.uwo.ca/img/pdfs/handouts\\_new/The%20Semicolon.pdf](http://writing.uwo.ca/img/pdfs/handouts_new/The%20Semicolon.pdf)

References:

<https://prowritingaid.com/Semicolon>

