

Semicolons

WHAT IS A SEMICOLON?

A semicolon (;) is a stronger mark of punctuation than a comma but not as strong as a period. A semicolon is used between equal grammatical elements such as independent clauses and items in a series.

Note: Semicolons *do not* link *dependent clauses* to *independent clauses*.

[Incorrect] Because it was snowing heavily; we decided to stay home.

[Correct] It was snowing heavily; we decided to stay home.

Semicolon Usage

1.

A semicolon may be used in place of a period to connect two *independent clauses* when the two clauses share a close relationship.

Mary went to the grocery store this afternoon; she purchased food for tonight's dinner.

Tom didn't have enough time to finish his exam; his class was only an hour long.

2.

A semicolon can also be used to join two *independent clauses* together with a conjunctive adverb (i.e. *however, nevertheless, therefore*). The semicolon is placed after the first independent clause and before the conjunctive adverb, and a comma is needed after the conjunctive adverb in front of the second independent clause.

Brad knew of many different roofers to do the job; **however**, he called Ultimate Roofers to do the job because the owner is his cousin.

Maggie has always been an excellent skier; **nevertheless**, her parents were always wary of having their little girl on the slopes.

3.

Semicolons can also be used to separate items in a list if the elements in the series already include commas.

The top five most visited cities in the United States are: New York, New York; Las Vegas, Nevada; Los Angeles, California; Orlando, Florida; and Chicago, Illinois.

The members of Bon Jovi include Jon Bon Jovi, vocalist and guitarist; Richie Sambora, guitarist; Tico Torres, drummer; and David Bryan, keyboardist.