

## SEMICOLONS

### WHAT IS A SEMICOLON?

A semicolon is a punctuation mark that has two primary functions. It is a way to fix run-on sentences/divide two connected sentences; it is also used in lists under special conditions.

### CONNECTING TWO SENTENCES INTO ONE:

Sometimes a writer can have two complete sentences that are related that they want to be read together. A semicolon functions like a period or a coordinating conjunction (e.g., and, but, for, nor, or, so, and yet), but it is a shorter pause while reading than a period, and a longer pause than a coordinating conjunction.

- I enjoyed visiting with you today; I would like to come back sometime.
- The first homework assignment is due September 2; however, do not neglect to start your final project early.

Notice how the two statements are complete thoughts by themselves, but they are related. A writer could insert a period and the sentences would still make sense, but a semicolon is used in this case so that the reader does not come to a full stop between the thoughts; the ideas can be read as if they are related to each other.

### CONNECTING ITEMS IN A LIST:

Typically, commas are used to separate items in a list, but if the items in a list are phrases containing commas, adding more commas to differentiate between the phrases becomes confusing. In this case, a semicolon is used to separate the objects. Pay attention to the highlighted parts of the sentence.

- I hate the outdoors because I can't ride a bike; I am allergic to trees, although not pine trees; I do not like to hike, except when it is fall; and I hate bugs!

Notice how the semicolons are located directly after each item in the list. Pay special attention to where the commas are located within each item in the list. These commas are the reason that the semicolons are used to separate the listed items.

Adapted from: Hacker D. & Sommers M. (2017). *The Bedford handbook: Instructor's annotated edition* (10<sup>th</sup> Edition). Bedford St. Martin's Macmillan Learning.

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