

How to use a semicolon

The most feared punctuation on earth

Created by The Oatmeal

<http://theoatmeal.com>



“ Using a semicolon isn't hard; I once saw a party gorilla do it. ”

Why

What's the point of a semicolon?

The most common way to use a semicolon is to connect two independent clauses. For example:

“ The ice cream truck man drove by my house today. He had big hairy knuckles. ”

The two statements are separated by a period. If read aloud, it would go something like this:

*“ The ice cream truck man drove by my house today. *take a breath* He had big hairy knuckles. ”*

Why

What's the point of a semicolon?

With a semicolon, however, it would sound like this:

“ *The ice cream truck man drove by my house today; he had big hairy knuckles.* ”

Basically what we did was eliminate the pause between the two statements without using words such as *and*, *but*, *nor*, or *yet*.



How

How do I use a semicolon?

If you have two independent clauses, meaning they could stand alone as their own sentences, it's ok to use a semicolon. For example:



“ *My aunt also had hairy knuckles; she loved to wash and comb them.* ”

This is an independent clause, meaning it could stand alone as a complete sentence.

This is also an independent clause; it could exist without being attached to its predecessor.

Don't

Don't use it with conjunctions.

Conjunctions are words like *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*.

“ My aunt's hairy knuckles are magnificent indeed, but I have no desire to stroke them. ”

A comma is used because there's a *but* separating the two clauses.



When

When should I use a semicolon?

“ I gnaw on old car tires; it strengthens my jaw so I’ll be better conditioned for bear combat. ”

Use a semicolon when you want to form a bond between two statements, typically when they are related to or contrast with one another.

In the example above, the relationship between gnawing on tires and combatting bears is strengthened by using a semicolon.



When

When should I use a semicolon?

“ I fought the bear and won. Also, I never kiss plague rats on the mouth. ”

Here is ok to kiss



In this sentence, your victory against the bear does not need to be connected to the plague rat, so a period is used.

Pause



Both bears and semicolons have pause.

Comma
(brief pause)



Pause



Both bears and semicolons have pause.

Semicolon
(moderate pause)



I'm pretty sure bologna is
made out of cow elbows,
but I ❤️ it anyway.

Pause



Both bears and semicolons have pause.

Period

(complete stop)

zzz...zzz..z



Pause



Both bears and semicolons have pause.

Comma
(brief pause)



Semicolon
(moderate pause)



Period
(complete stop)



When

When should I use a semicolon?



I've got all these commas!
How can we ever be together
without forming a run-on sentence?!

Nothing can stop true love.
Use a semicolon, you fool!



“ When dinosaurs agree on something, they’ll often high five one another; dinosaurs are all about high fives. ”

If you'd used a comma in this sentence it would have resulted in a comma splice. If you'd used a period you'd lose the connection between the two clauses.

Internal

Use a semicolon to connect sentences that contain internal punctuation.

Super

Use a semicolon as a super-comma.

“ While searching for a good place to get a unicorn burger, I traveled to Seattle, Washington; Tokyo, Japan; and London, England. ”

Use a semicolon if you need to make a list of items that are separated with a comma. This often occurs when listing locations, names, dates, and descriptions.



The most enchanting meat on earth comes from the thighs of a unicorn.

Super

Use a semicolon as a super-comma.

Mayonnaise made me
the man I am today!



“ My favorite people include Samuel Slaughterjaws, a famous unicorn hunter; my uncle Wilford, a world champion at mayonnaise eating contests; and Nikola Tesla, the most awesome dude to ever fire a lightning bolt at an angry peasant. ”

The semicolon enables you to list and describe all three characters in the same sentence.

The End



“Godzilla is a misunderstood creature; beneath his raging desire to set people on fire and eat them lies a gentle giant who just wants to cuddle.”