

;(THE SEMICOLON)

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A semicolon looks different than its relative the colon in that the bottom half of the semicolon is a comma.

Semicolons can be used in two ways:

1. **To join together two related statements of equal weight and importance into one sentence.**

Example:

It is important to proofread your work before turning it in; typos and other mistakes can make you seem careless.

- ◆ The purpose of the semicolon in this case is to prevent the choppy nature of separating two ideas that are closely related and to ask the reader to make a connection between the two statements. The semicolon also shows a progression from the first statement to the second.
- ◆ It is important to remember that statements which are separated by a semicolon must be independent clauses. A good way to make sure that your use of the semicolon is correct is to separate the statements on either side of the semicolon and put a period between the two instead. Once you are certain that each statement can function alone as a sentence, you can join them.

2. **To separate items in a list which contain internal punctuation.**

Example:

The Millennium Events Committee has planned several exciting events for spring semester, including lectures by Nikki Giovanni, an African-American poet and human rights activist; Benazir Bhutto, former prime minister of Pakistan; and Sir John Polkinghorne, who will address the topic of science and religion.

- ◆ Internal punctuation separates the guests' names from their descriptions. Therefore, the author has used semicolons.
- ◆ If none of the items in the list includes internal punctuation, then a comma should be used.

Here are some sentences in which a semicolon is used effectively.

- ◆ The physical differences between Jude and the university students are symbolic of more than just their differing social positions; they are emblems of Jude's ignorance and the impossibility of his dreams.
- ◆ This place of safety and sanity is not on a calm and smooth plane of molten glass; reaching it involves a leap of faith and tough confrontation with the reality of pain and death.
- ◆ In *Heart of Darkness*, the real danger of going into the wilderness is not that of confronting savages or dying of disease; the thing most to be dreaded is the internal change, the possible descent into madness.

For more information on semicolon usage, see

The New St. Martin's Handbook, pages 368-372

<http://englishplus.com/grammar/00000092.htm>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g-overview.html>



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