Semicolons

Semicolons are used to join two sentence elements where each of the elements could stand as a complete sentence on its own; both of these sentence elements have their own subjects and verbs. Use a semicolon instead of a period to indicate specific relationships between the two elements.

- Use a semicolon to **join 2 complete sentences** when the second sentence restates the first or when the two parts are of equal emphasis and there is NO coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS).
  
  We worked hard on the project; it took a great deal of time.
  
  (The second part basically restates the first part.)

  It had stormed the night before; tree limbs and branches covered the road.
  
  (Both parts of this statement are of equal importance; the second part relates to but does not restate the first.)

- Use a semicolon to **join 2 complete sentences** when the second sentence begins with a **conjunctive adverb** (however, therefore, moreover, furthermore, thus, meanwhile, instead, nonetheless, otherwise) or a **transition** (in fact, for example, that is, for instance, in addition, in other words, on the other hand, even so).

  They would have had a hard time affording a house; **instead,** they rented one.

  The stray dog had a lot of fleas; **otherwise,** he was perfectly healthy.

**FYI:** The rules for commas apply to both of the sentences joined by a semicolon.

- Use a semicolon **between elements in a list** of three or more when those elements have commas in them already.

  We visited Venice, Italy; Paris, France; and London, England.

**Practice Exercises:**

1) Incorrect: I like writing, it is easier than I thought.

   Explanation: There are two parts to the sentence that could stand alone. Joining them with a comma makes a **comma splice.** Fix the sentence by using a semicolon because the two parts are directly related.

   Corrected: I like writing; it is easier than I thought.

2) Incorrect: I hate writing, however I understand it is necessary in life.

   Explanation: There are two parts of a sentence that are linked with the conjunctive adverb “however.” We need a semicolon to avoid a comma splice or a run-on sentence.

   Corrected: I hate writing; however, I understand it is necessary in life.

3) Incorrect: I enjoy writing classes: the teachers are nice, which is helpful, the students are friendly, which is enjoyable, and the work is not too hard, which is exciting.

   Explanation: It is unclear what the elements of the list are because they contain their own commas.

   Corrected: I enjoy writing classes: the teachers are nice, which is helpful; the students are friendly, which is enjoyable; and the work is not too hard, which is exciting.