The Semicolon

The semicolon, reputed to be the most feared punctuation on earth, is actually not that complicated to use once you understand its basic rules. Though most commonly known to join two independent clauses closely related in thought, it does much more than that, and can even be used to give someone a wily wink ;)

Semicolons Connect Related Independent Clauses

The sentences before and after the semicolon should be complete, and the two sentences should share a close, logical connection.

- *Some people write with a word processor; others write with a pen or pencil.* ✓
- *I ordered a cheeseburger for lunch; life's too short for counting calories.* ✓
- *The cow is brown, it is also old.* ✗

The examples above are all made up of two complete, grammatically correct sentences glued together. The third, incorrect sentence is a comma splice; in order to correct it, you can either replace the comma with a semicolon, or add an "and" before the second clause.

Semicolons Replace Conjunctions

Semicolons function as conjunctions to link two independent clauses, so you cannot use both of them at the same time. There are six coordinating conjunctions: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so.*

- *I saw a magnificent albatross, and it was eating a mouse.*
- *I saw a magnificent albatross; it was eating a mouse.*

Use Semicolons in a Serial List

You can use a semicolon to divide the items of a list or series, if any of the items contain commas.

- *There are two common ways to write: with a pen or pencil, which is inexpensive and easily accessible; or by computer and printer, which is more expensive but quick and neat.*
- *I like cows: they give us milk, which tastes good; they give us beef, which also tastes good; and they give us leather, which is used for shoes and coats.*

Use Semicolons With Conjunctive Adverbs

If a conjunctive adverb links two independent clauses, you should use a semicolon. Some common conjunctive adverbs include *moreover, nevertheless, however, also, otherwise, therefore, likewise,* and *consequently.*

- *I needed to go for a walk and get some fresh air; also, I needed to buy milk.*
- *The students had been advised against walking alone at night; however, Cathy decided walking wasn't dangerous if it was early in the evening.*
- *I'm not all that fond of the colors of tiger lilies; moreover, they don't smell very good.*

Sources: Grammarly