

# MAKING SENSE OF SEMICOLONS



The semicolon is a useful form of punctuation for **connecting closely-related ideas** in a sentence, usually in the form of **independent clauses**. It allows the reader to identify ideas or claims that are connected to each other.



## How to Use Semicolons

There are a number of ways to use a semicolon grammatically; stylistically, however, it is most effective when used sparingly to perform the following tasks:

- 1 Connect two independent clauses of equal grammatical rank - **OR** -
- 2 Separate items in complicated lists

### Semicolons and Two Independent Clauses with No Transitions

A semicolon is used to link two independent clauses when the ideas in the two clauses are **closely related**, and there is **no coordinating conjunction** (and, or, but).

*e.g., Some students write down everything said in class<sup>1</sup>; others take down only the key points<sup>2</sup>.*

- 1 Independent clause
- 2 Independent clause

### Semicolons and Two Independent Clauses with Transitions

A semicolon is used between two independent clauses that are linked by a **transition word or expression**.

*e.g., Mark took a French course during the summer<sup>1</sup>; however<sup>2</sup>, at the end of the course, he still couldn't understand French<sup>3</sup>.*

- 1 Independent clause
- 2 **Transition word**
- 3 Independent clause

A **transition word or expression** links words, phrases, or clauses to connect ideas smoothly.

*e.g., for example, as a result, in addition, in fact, on the contrary, however, similarly, consequently*



## Semicolons and Complex Lists

A semicolon is used between items in a **complex list** or **series**, especially when the items already contain commas. The semicolon allows the reader to recognize **major groupings of words**.

*e.g., Students in this course will study the historical, digital, and economic origins of Maker Culture<sup>1</sup>; the practical, philosophical, and gender resistance to the movement<sup>2</sup>; and the technological and political ramifications others might not have considered<sup>3</sup>.*

- 1 First in list: topic of study #1
- 2 Second in list: topic of study #2
- 3 Third in list: topic of study #3

Except for lists, asking “could I put a **period** in place of the semicolon?” is an easy way to identify whether your semicolon use is appropriate. If the answer is “yes,” you are probably using it correctly.

