Semicolons (;)

Separating Independent Clauses

A necessary skill for deciding whether to use a semicolon rather than a comma is the ability to identify an independent clause. An independent clause is *independent* because it can stand alone, *by itself,* as a complete sentence. There are several ways to use semicolons to combine independent clauses.

- Connecting two independent clauses without adding any other words
  Ex: *Writing is an enjoyable pastime**;** many people write for fun.*

- Adding a transitional expression (like "as a result" or "because of this") or a conjunctive adverb (like "however," "therefore," or "meanwhile") between two independent clauses

  Ex: *I enjoy writing poems**;** however, my best friend prefers to write stories*.

- Adding a coordinating conjunction between two independent clauses. In this case, one may use either a semicolon or a comma, but a semicolon may help the reader separate the clauses when one clause has commas within it.

  Ex: *Michelle enjoys writing short stories, essays, and articles for her school newspaper**;** but her favorite activity is writing poetry.*

  Ex: *In order to communicate effectively in the business world today, one must develop good writing skills**;** and developing good writing skills takes time, effort, and practice*.

Separating Items in a List

Sometimes in a list of items, one or more items will contain another list within it. When this occurs, one can choose to use a semicolon to separate each of the main items, while using a comma when necessary within each individual item.

Ex: (list items)
A. *the surroundings are 1) clean, 2) organized, and 3) quiet*
B. *the lighting is sufficiently bright*
C. *one has 1) a pencil, 2) an eraser, and 3) plenty of paper*

Ex: (sentence)
*When sitting down to write, it is helpful to make sure that the surroundings are clean, organized, and quiet**;** that the lighting is sufficiently bright**;** and that one has a pencil, an eraser, and plenty of paper.*