

# THE SEMICOLON

## Recognize a semicolon when you find one.

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The semicolon ( ; ) is a powerful mark of punctuation with three uses.

The first appropriate use of the semicolon is to connect two related **main clauses** (complete sentences).

Follow this pattern:

**Main Clause** + ; + **Main Clause** .

Here is an example:

Grandma still rides her Harley motorcycle; her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

A semicolon can also team up with a transition—often a **conjunctive adverb**—to connect two sentences close in meaning.

Here is the pattern:

**Main Clause** + ; + Transition + , + **Main Clause** .

Check out this example:

My father does not approve of his mother cruising around town on a Harley motorcycle; **however**, Grandma has never cared what anyone thinks.

Finally, use the semicolon to avoid confusion when you have complicated lists of items.

Here is the pattern:

**Item** + , + More Information + ; + **Item** + , + More Information + ; + and + **Item** + , + More Information

Read the following example:

On a Harley motorcycle, my grandmother and her poodle have traveled to **Anchorage**, Alaska; **San Francisco**, California; and **Tijuana**, Mexico.

Keep these three things in mind when you use a semicolon:

- The two **main clauses** that the semicolon joins should be closely related in meaning.
- Do not capitalize the word that follows the semicolon unless that word is a **proper noun**, one that is *always* capitalized.
- Limit your use of semicolons; you should not scatter them haphazardly throughout your writing. Semicolons are like glasses of champagne; save them for special occasions.

