

## Semicolons

**Semicolons** act as periods, but they establish relationships between two independent clauses (complete sentences) that are **much more closely related** than normal sentences. If periods go between sentences that are in the same family, semicolons go between twins.

A useful way to check if a semicolon is appropriate is to see if the ideas on each side of the semicolon point to each other.

**Example:** John never says please; Jane always does.

Note how the ideas on each side of the semicolon (saying please) speak to each other.

### When To Use Semicolons

There are primarily two instances in which you should use a semicolon:

1. To separate closely related independent clauses.

**Example:** Travis Piazza is my friend; George Anderson isn't.

2. Before conjunctive adverbs that connect independent clauses.

**Example:** We didn't study; instead, we watched movies and ordered Dominos.

**Examples of conjunctive adverbs:** *accordingly, furthermore, moreover, similarly, also, hence, namely, still, anyway, however, nevertheless, then, besides, incidentally, thereafter, certainly, indeed, nonetheless, therefore, consequently, instead, now, thus, likewise, otherwise, undoubtedly, and meanwhile.*

### Semicolon Use

1. Ingrid is nice; my father is nicer. CORRECT (very close relationship)

2. During the summer; Kirby studies. INCORRECT (fragment)

3. Today is Saturday; I love summer vacation. INCORRECT (no close relationship)

4. Yesterday, during the morning; I ate breakfast. INCORRECT (during...=fragment)

5. Ackerman is a good man; his mother is fifty years old. INCORRECT (no close relationship)

## Exercise on Semicolon Use

**Directions:** Choose the letter that corresponds to the correct answer.

1. My brother is a great guy; my cousin is not.
  - A. Change the semicolon to a comma
  - B. Sentence correctly uses a semicolon between closely-related independent clauses
2. Brightly-colored snakes tend to be venomous; some snakes live in the water.
  - A. Change the semicolon to a period because the independent clauses aren't closely related
  - B. Sentence correctly uses a semicolon between closely-related independent clauses
3. The ancient Egyptians advanced our understanding of math; the ancient Greeks advanced our knowledge of philosophy.
  - A. Change the semicolon to a comma
  - B. Sentence correctly uses a semicolon between closely-related independent clauses
4. Insulation keeps houses cooler in the summer and; warmer in the winter
  - A. Delete the semicolon
  - B. Sentence correctly uses a semicolon between closely-related independent clauses
5. I love partying on Thursdays because; the bars are less crowded.
  - A. Delete the semicolon because it creates a fragment
  - B. Sentence correctly uses a semicolon between closely-related independent clauses
6. Some people respond to my emails; others do not.
  - A. Change the semicolon to a period
  - B. Sentence correctly uses a semicolon between closely-related independent clauses
7. If you want to do well on the test, study; every night and visit the professor during office hours.
  - A. Delete the semicolon because it creates a fragment
  - B. Sentence correctly uses a semicolon between closely-related independent clauses
8. In the winter; I love to drink hot chocolate and to eat warm pudding.
  - A. Delete the semicolon because it creates a fragment
  - B. Sentence correctly uses a semicolon between closely-related independent clauses
9. Writing essays is very difficult; my sister is a good student.
  - A. Change the semicolon to a since the ideas are not very closely related.

B. Sentence correctly uses a semicolon between closely-related independent clauses

10. I don't think he meant to hurt your feelings; however, I do think he can be cruel at times.

A. Change the semicolon to a comma

B. Sentence correctly uses a semicolon before an adverb that joins independent clauses

## Semicolon Exercise 2

For the online version of this exercise, go to

[http://depts.dyc.edu/learningcenter/owl/exercises/semicolons\\_ex1.htm](http://depts.dyc.edu/learningcenter/owl/exercises/semicolons_ex1.htm)

### Instructions

Semicolons act as periods: you need a full sentence on both sides of a semicolon. A semicolon belongs in each of the following sentences. Determine where the semicolon belongs. Then select the word that comes just **before** the semicolon.

### Questions

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1. It is raining outside I will bring my umbrella with me.

a.) raining

b.) outside

c.) umbrella

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2. Hopefully, the weather will change soon otherwise, the whole summer will go by without the sun shining.

a.) soon

b.) otherwise

c.) summer

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3. She doesn't understand algebra therefore, she will probably not pass the math final.

a.) understand

b.) algebra

c.) therefore

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4. We will play tennis tomorrow then we will go out for dinner.

a.) play

b.) tennis

c.) tomorrow

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5. She had very high grades in high school she applied to Harvard University.

- a.) grades
- b.) school
- c.) applied

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6. Some colleges offer full time scholarships others do not.

- a.) colleges
- b.) time
- c.) scholarships

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7. There is a lot of financial aid available you just have to know where to look for it.

- a.) lot
- b.) aid
- c.) available

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8. Some institutions require a lot of financial support from parents some require only a little.

- a.) support
- b.) parents
- c.) require

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9. You should always choose a college according to whether you believe you'll be happy you're the one who will be attending for four years.

- a.) college
- b.) believe
- c.) happy

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10. It's such a beautiful day I will walk in Niagara Falls.

- a.) beautiful
- b.) day
- c.) walk

### Semicolon Exercise 3

For the online version of this exercise, go to

[http://depts.dyc.edu/learningcenter/owl/exercises/semicolons\\_ex2.htm](http://depts.dyc.edu/learningcenter/owl/exercises/semicolons_ex2.htm)

#### Instructions

Each of the following sentences may or may not contain a semicolon. Determine if a semicolon is needed. If it is, select the word that comes just **before** the semicolon.

#### Questions

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1. He wanted to take a walk, so we drove to Niagara Falls and walked around the park.

- a.) walk
- b.) Falls
- c.) no semicolon

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2. She did the laundry she used the last of the laundry detergent.

- a.) laundry
- b.) up
- c.) no semicolon

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3. They both went swimming while they were on vacation in Mexico.

- a.) swimming
- b.) vacation
- c.) no semicolon

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4. They finished digging in the garden and planting flowers it looked beautiful.

- a.) garden
- b.) flowers
- c.) no semicolon

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5. To build the fence around the garden, they needed to dig trenches close to seven feet deep.

- a.) garden
- b.) trenches
- c.) no semicolon

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6. The garden contained vegetables they will harvest them in fall.

- a.) vegetables

- b.) them
- c.) no semicolon

---

7. Their house and garden are extremely important to them that's why they take care of their property so well.

- a.) garden
- b.) them
- c.) no semicolon

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8. When planting impatiens, it's important to plant some in the sun and some in the shade because it's hard to tell how much of each needs.

- a.) sun
- b.) shade
- c.) no semicolon

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9. All of the garden tools are kept in the garage they are cleaned every spring.

- a.) tools
- b.) garage
- c.) no semicolon

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10. My favorite flower is forget-me-nots even though some people consider it a weed.

- a.) forget-me-nots
- b.) though
- c.) no semicolon