

Semicolons (;)

Semicolons look like a period on top of a comma. They are often paired with a parenthesis to create the common wink emoji ;) Throughout this handout, we'll learn how to use them correctly.

- **Combining Independent Clauses**

First, semicolons are often used to combine two closely related independent clauses, which are clauses that express a complete thought. The semicolon will act as the main connection between these two clauses. On that note, it is important to know that a semicolon is not used interchangeably with a comma or period. Let's take a look at this example.

Incorrect: He enjoyed taking the course at UT Dallas; because the professor was extremely friendly and helpful.

Correct: He enjoyed taking the course at UT Dallas; the professor was extremely friendly and helpful.

As you can see here, semicolons are used to only connect independent clauses that are closely related. Hence, it would be incorrect to use a semicolon to write "I baked cookies; the professor was extremely friendly and helpful. Also, the subordinating conjunction "because" is not needed when a semicolon is used.

Semicolons are often paired with different conjunctive adverbs as well. These include however, moreover, therefore, hence, and much more.

- **Clearing up a List**

We've all had a time when our serial list became too long and confusing due to the number of commas and other punctuations. When you come across a situation like this, consider using a semicolon to divide the items within the list. Let's take a look at the following example:

Incorrect: Over the summer, I traveled to Richardson, Texas, Paris, France, Orlando, Florida, Vancouver, Canada, and Seoul, South Korea.

Correct: Over the summer, I traveled to Richardson, Texas; Paris, France; Orlando, Florida; Vancouver, Canada; Seoul, South Korea.

When the items within the list contain commas, semicolons are a better replacement to clarify each part of the sentence.

Tip:

Semicolons are useful to combine closely related independent clauses and clear up a list. However, it is important to not overuse this punctuation as well. Throughout your writing, consider the overall flow of each sentence and paragraph, and determine the best fit.