

Punctuation that Confuses Us: The Semicolon and Colon

Uses of the Semicolon

1. To join independent clauses in compound sentences that do not have coordinating conjunctions (and, or, but, nor, for, so, yet) and commas as connectors. Words like "however," "moreover," "thus," and "therefore," are often used as connectors in these sentences.
 - Comparisons are often used to emphasize a basic idea; **however**, they are more often used to explain something complex or unfamiliar by showing how something we don't understand relates to something we do.
 - There was no running and no shouting; all the children behaved very well; **therefore**, they will all get a treat.
 - Working mothers nationally pay an average of \$53 a week for child care; this means that many women pay nearly half of their weekly salary to day care centers or babysitters.
2. To separate long or complicated items in a series which already includes commas.
 - The speakers were Dr. Judith Cornwell, English; Dr. Peter Mortrude, biology; Dr. Shirley Enders, history; **and** Dr. Charles Viceroy, mathematics.
 - I have recommended this student because she communicates well with other students, faculty, and staff; completes her assignments ably and on time; **and** demonstrates an ability to organize people, materials, and time.
3. To separate two long or complex independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction if confusion would result from using a comma.
 - Ishmael, the narrator in *Moby-Dick* goes to sea, he says, "whenever it is a damp, drizzly November" in his heart and soul; **but** Ahab, the captain of the ship, goes to sea because of his obsession to hunt and kill the great white whale, Moby Dick.
 - By the end of the sessions, the participants will have learned how to handle excessive amounts of paperwork, to work under pressure, and to juggle deadlines; **and**, if they complete all requirements, they will have a valuable addition to their resumes.