

Semicolons: A Little More Than a Comma

Semicolons are an underused punctuation mark. Some writers avoid them by rewriting sentences, but they are an easy mark to wrap your mind around.

Semicolons cause a greater pause than a comma and have seven good uses:

1. Between parts of a compound sentence when they aren't joined by a conjunction (*and, but, or, nor*):
I need to go to a meeting now; I'll call John later.
2. Between independent clauses when they are joined by a conjunction:
I believe we can handle the deal; and I believe we will make millions from it.
3. To separate independent clauses when the clauses are long, or when the clauses already have commas:
Since it was raining, we postponed our visit to several historic sites; although when the weather cleared up, we took our tour.
4. After each clause in a series of three or more:
John wore red; Harry wore blue; and Mark wore green.
5. Before words that connect two independent clauses, such as *hence, however, nevertheless, therefore, thus*:
Today is a holiday; however, I am working.
6. To separate items in a list when commas are used between the items:
On the agenda were John Jones, the president; Jane Smith, the treasurer; and Kate Price, the secretary.
7. Before explanatory expressions such as *for example, for instance, that is, namely*, if the break in thought needs something more than a comma:
He didn't want to go to the party for one particular reason; namely, his ex-wife would be there,

It's not necessary to shy away from a semicolon. These rules will help you use them with confidence!