



Semicolons

Semicolons can be an extremely useful punctuation mark in many essays. However, using them incorrectly, or too frequently, can cause your essay to appear less coherent and unprofessional. Here are some tips for using semicolons appropriately.

What are semicolons?

Semicolons are punctuation marks that stand in the place of commas (and sometimes periods) to indicate a pause or connection between two ideas. However, the semicolon may only be used if it is between two complete sentences. The difference between semicolons and commas is that semicolons do not require a conjunction after the punctuation to connect two independent clauses.

When can you use semicolons?

Using semicolons is simple; you can use a semicolon anywhere there is a comma that separates two independent clauses. However, using too many semicolons comes across as immature and unprofessional. Instead, it may be a good idea to limit the use of semicolons further. Semicolons should be used in the stead of a comma that separates two independent clauses in which the two independent clauses are directly connected to one another via a common idea. For example, "We should go to the movies; the theater is selling tickets at half price tomorrow" is an appropriate use of a semicolon.

Keep in mind, however, that overusing semicolons is still a potential problem. You may begin feeling comfortable with semicolons enough to use them in every other sentence; **do not do this**. Semicolons should be used stylistically more so than functionally because every semicolon can be replaced by either a comma + conjunction or a period. Semicolons should be used strategically to ensure coherent writing.

If you still aren't sure how to use semicolons, the Writing Center is happy to help!