



As a general rule, you may use a semicolon between items of equal rank, such as two independent clauses or phrases, and in listing items that already contain commas.

1. To List Items Already Containing Commas:

On my grand tour of Europe, I visited my pen pals from Paris, France; London, England; and Rome, Italy.

Note: APA and MLA have style stipulations for lists, particularly those requiring a colon and semicolons. To learn more, consult the appropriate handbook.

2. To Show a Close Relationship between Ideas Expressed in Two Complete Sentences:

The semicolon is your friend; the hyphen is your nemesis.
To err is human; to rub it in is divine.
Soap is caustic; accordingly, do not pour it in the eyes.

Note: A period could do nicely in the above examples, but the writer chose a semicolon to indicate the close relationship between the ideas expressed. Think of it this way: since another term for the period is “full stop,” and the writer didn’t want to show a full stop, or breakage, between the ideas expressed, she chose to use the semicolon in place of a period.

3. When Using a Semicolon after Quoted Material Not Containing the Semicolon, Place the Semicolon after the Final Quotation Mark:

According to Steiger, “Molecules come in many shapes and sizes”; the Gladden Theory, however, claims that molecules are uniform.