



Douglas College

Douglas College Learning Centre

SEMICOLONS

Semicolons (;) are strong punctuation marks, stronger than commas but not quite like periods. They are easy to use because they have only three uses.

◆ **Between two short sentences**

In order to use a semicolon, the sentences must not only be short but also have an obvious connection in meaning.

Examples:

Anna loves figure skating; she hates hockey.

He loves her; she loves him.

Frank burnt himself; he still has the scar.

◆ **Between two complete thoughts before a transition word or phrase**

Examples:

Bring your I.D. card; otherwise, you won't be allowed in.

She does a lot of travelling between semesters; for example, on the last semester break, she went to Mexico.

Subordinators (e.g. because, when) and coordinators (e.g. but, so) cannot be used with a semi-colon. See "Connectors: Usage and Meaning".

◆ **Between items in a list**

Usually commas are used to separate items in a list. However, sometimes commas are needed within items in a list; in those cases, semicolons are used to separate the listed items.

Example:

I am struggling to decide what university to attend: U.B.C., which has a big beautiful campus; S.F.U., which is close to my home; or U.C.F.V., which is smaller and more personal.

Exercise 1: Using Semicolons in Sentences

Add semicolons and commas where necessary.

1. When she comes to Vancouver, he is going to take his sister to see a lot of Vancouver's attractions: Granville Island with its exciting market Grouse Mountain with its incredible view of the city Stanley Park with its beautiful sea wall and Queen Elizabeth Park with its lovely sunken garden.
2. She works downtown he works in Surrey.
3. Smoking can kill you nevertheless millions of people still smoke.
4. He really wants to improve his writing but he finds he never has the time.
5. Some people prefer multiple choice exams however others prefer essay exams.
6. When I called the restaurant, I learned that it had closed down consequently we had to go somewhere else.
7. The pizza had her favorite toppings: ham pineapple and tomato.
8. The bald eagle is a beautiful bird it is found in greatest numbers off the BC coast.
9. The circus had some amazing characters: Tina the tight-rope walker Fantastic Frank the dog trainer and Leaping Leonard the lion tamer.
10. Norman Bethune is not well known in Canada surprisingly he is famous in China.
11. She reported the accident to the police and then she phoned her mother.
12. Beach volleyball is increasing in popularity you can see lots of people playing it every sunny day at Kitsilano Beach.

For more practice, see:

Learning Centre Handouts

GR6.30 Connectors: Usage and Meaning
GR7.20 Commas – With Exercises

Hefferman, J. and Lincoln, J. (1992) Writing: a college handbook. New York: Norton. p. 397-8.

Oshima, A. and Hogue, A. (1991). Writing academic English (2nd edition). Longman. p. 256-258.

Hefferman, J. and Lincoln, J. (1992). Evergreen. Toronto: Houghton Mifflin. p. 325-6.

USING SEMICOLONS IN SENTENCES – ANSWER KEY**Exercise 1: Using Semicolons in Sentences**

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1. When she comes to Vancouver, he is going to take his sister to see a lot of Vancouver's attractions: Granville Island, with its exciting market; Grouse Mountain, with its incredible view of the city; Stanley Park, with its beautiful sea wall; and Queen Elizabeth Park, with its lovely sunken garden.
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4. He really wants to improve his writing, but he finds he never has the time.
5. Some people prefer multiple choice exams; however, others prefer essay exams.
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