Semicolons

The semicolon (;) separates equal and balanced elements; it basically functions like a period (.), separating two complete sentences (two independent clauses).

Use a semicolon between main clauses NOT joined by and, but, or another coordinating conjunction.

Last night I wrote a ten page research paper for English 315; I also had to study for a test in my Shakespeare class.

Use a semicolon between main clauses related by conjunctive adverbs or transitional expressions such as however and in fact.

I studied over two hours for my Shakespeare test; however, I was still not prepared for many of the questions.

Some of the questions were just too obscure; for example, one question asked, “What are the first words spoken by Puck in A Midsummer Night’s Dream?”

Use semicolons between main clauses or series of items containing commas.

Normally, commas separate main clauses linked by coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or) and items in a series; however, when the clauses or series items contain commas, a semicolon between them makes the sentence easier to read.

The research paper should consist of an introduction, whereby you clearly state your thesis; body paragraphs, whereby you support and discuss your thesis; and a conclusion, whereby you leave your reader with something to think about.

Do NOT use a semicolon in the following situations:

Between a main clause and a subordinate clause or phrase:

NO According to Dr. Hardnose; only four students passed the Shakespeare exam.

YES According to Dr. Hardnose, only four students passed the Shakespeare exam.

Before a series or explanation:

NO Professors have heard all sorts of excuses why students do poorly on tests; family illness, too much work, too little time.

YES Professors have heard all sorts of excuses why students do poorly on tests: family illness, too much work, too little time.